The ROCKETEER

#89

DAVID ANTHONY KRAFT'S

COMICS INTERVIEW

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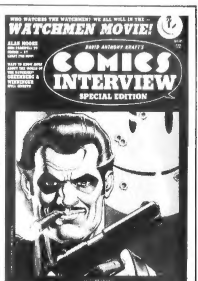

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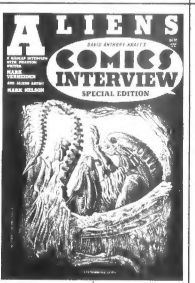

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UP FRONT

If you, like me, are a fan of the great newspaper comic strips, this is the time to be alive. Eclipse, Kitchen Sink — yes, and the Comics Interview Group — plus many other publishers are working together to rescue the great work of many masters of our medium from the oblivion of yesterday's newsprint.

But for every loving reconstruction of a run of strips in a beautiful, durable edition, there's a shoddy piece of trash produced by an outfit that seems to regard the old strips less as art deserving of preservation, than as filler for a book they can sell. Compare, for example, the excellent Fantagraphics editions of the early PRINCE VALIANT pages with the abominable Pioneer version of the same strips. We needn't even mention the rest of the Pioneer line. If you love good newspaper strips in at least minimally decent editions, you've stayed clear of these insulting and overpriced books.

NBM, which won accolades for putting into print the entire run of **Caniff**'s TERRY AND THE PIRATES, then proceeded to publish those strips in a paperback edition. Beware! Early volumes omit key strips. They seem oblivious of the fact that the strips tell a story, and are intended to be read rather than just looked at. To read the build-up to a tremendous confrontation, followed immediately by the aftermath thereto, is unsatisfying to say the least.

Everybody is entitled to one mistake, of course. But the same publisher is responsible for editions of **Roy Crane's** WASH TUBBS AND CAPTAIN EASY. The dailies are marred by an occasional faint original, but otherwise excellent. But the Sundays, breathtakingly beautiful in their original newspaper format, are sliced up to fit odd-size pages, then printed in muddy black-and-white from color originals, wasting half of a fairly expensive book. Since the stories are separate, there is no reason to put the two in the same book. If NBM can't do a decent job of reprinting the EASY Sunday pages, it should leave the job to a more competent publisher.

What specifically sparked this editorial was the recent appearance of COMIC STRIP SHOWCASE #2, reprinting the exquisite POLLY AND HER PALS, by **Cliff Sterrett**. The publisher, Arcadia Publications, seems to think nothing of cutting up four-panel daily gag strips so they can be pasted onto a 3x3 grid. Well, I don't think very much of it myself. In addition to spoiling many gags by separating build-up from punchline, this practice makes it possible to mismatch pieces of strips — an error committed over and over in this poorly-produced book. POLLY is one of the all-time great strips, but a book like this does nothing to satisfy its many fans and, in fact, makes a good edition in the future less likely.

What's to be done? It's tempting to say boycott 'em and drive the shysters out of business. But NBM eventually saw the light on TERRY — maybe they'll do so on EASY, too. And Arcadia has put out decent books, albeit not on such deserving strips as POLLY. On the other hand, buying the books not only suborns this behavior — it also leaves us feeling ripped off.

So what's to be done? You tell me.

— Don Markstein

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"We had read the first batch of comics that David

PAUL

Paul DeMeo and Danny Bilson are busy guys. Their Pet Fly production company is producing THE FLASH for CBS and, with any luck, THE HUMAN TARGET for ABC, while their script for Dave Stevens' THE ROCKETEER is in production as a major film from Disney with HONEY, I SHRUNK THE KIDS director Joe Johnston at the helm. We caught up to Paul in his office overlooking the streets of Central City . . .

DAN HAGEN: *What's the status of THE ROCKETEER now?*

PAUL DEMEO: THE ROCKETEER started shooting September 4th.

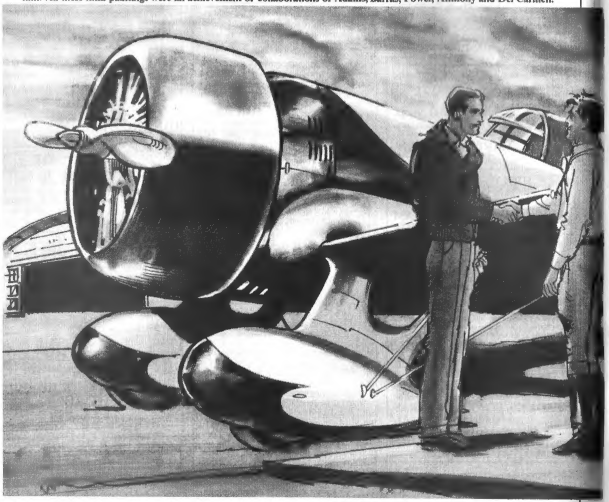
DAN: *Is it all cast?*

PAUL: No, the only member of the cast that's set is an actor by the name of **Bill Campbell**, who's playing the Rocketeer.

DAN: *Danny Bilson had said you'd been considering this for, what, five years? What was the evolution of the project?*

PAUL: We had read the first batch of comics that David had put out in the mid-'80s, and we were thinking what a great movie it would make, because it just naturally lent itself to that form. We tried to contact **Dave Stevens** initially because — even before we started pursuing the Rocketeer as a movie project — we tried to hire Dave as a set designer for a movie that we did for Empire Films called ZONE TROOPERS. We were unable to locate him at the time, but finally through a mutual acquaintance we found Dave and we told him that we were interested in trying to develop a story with him from the comic that we could take around and pitch for

Here and throughout this interview: the rare and unusually-detailed storyboards from the upcoming ROCKETEER Disney feature film. All these mini-paintings were an achievement of collaborations of Adams, Barras, Power, Anthony and Del Carmen.



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put out — what a great movie it would make!"

DE MEO

the ROCKETEER movie.

DAN: *What appealed to you about the Rocketeer as a movie property?*

PAUL: Well, I think we grabbed this right off the bat — it's a very striking image, the figure of the Rocketeer, himself, once it was expanded to really be movie scale — because in the initial comics, you know, it's a comics story. It doesn't really have the meat on its bones that you would need for a film. We just thought it was a lot of fun and there was a lot of adventure to be had there, and the characters were pretty interesting. And the whole arena in which it took place . . .

DAN: *The '30s period thing?*

PAUL: Right. The '30s period, the air racing. And we're real suckers for the period, anyway. We really enjoy doing things set in that era.

DAN: *What do you think is romantic about that era? It strikes me that way, too.*

PAUL: You know, it's hard to say. What I think is romantic about it in terms of the science of it, the way it applies to the Rocketeer, is there was something about that period between the wars that really saw a sort of romanticizing of the industrial age and the future of science as being very benevolent.

DAN: *You see it in Doc Savage, for example?*

PAUL: Yeah. Applying science for its advances rather than its detriments, the way we maybe would tend to look at it today. It was a very optimistic era, except for the Depression.

DAN: *In a way, it had to be optimistic because of the Depression.*

PAUL: It had become so difficult for everyone. I think that the pulp fiction of that period is really appealing, too. It's kind of odd. **Howard Chaykin,** who is one of the writers on THE FLASH, at one time pointed this out to us. He said, "I don't get you guys. You're not nostalgic for your own childhood. You're nostalgic for your parents' childhood." It's kind of a funny analogy.

DAN: *Yeah, I think the same thing. I look at the old pulps, too, and have some of the old movie serials that were before my time. All that fascinates me. I know that, had I been a kid then, I would have loved that stuff.*

PAUL: Well, there's a real energy to it, I think, and there's a certain innocence that carries it through. There was a real imagination going on there before everything got real cynical.

DAN: *Innocence, and yet a violence that would put people in a tizzy today, perhaps. There was a lot of action in those things.*

PAUL: It was action rather than graphic violence. I think that has a lot to do with it, and I think what we liked about the Rocketeer was that it was a period story, but at the same time it could be told in a modern form that could appeal to an audience of today just like the way RAIDERS OF THE LOST ARK and those films did — except one thing that we really picked up from the RAIDERS movies is you don't really get such a sense of period from them, I don't think . . .

DAN: *Because it all takes place abroad in some primitive environment?*

PAUL: Other than the Nazis, which of course is in the period. Because of the language of the film itself and the fact that it's, as you said, globe-trotting and doesn't really spend time here in the States, you don't get so much of a feel for the era as you do with something like THE ROCKETEER. Because it's set in Hollywood and Los Angeles in 1938, and we tried to make it as faithful to the period in terms of slang and accouterments as was reasonable for the movie. At the same time, we tried to update some of the attitudes and make the people realistic, while not losing the sense of fun. This particular movie wouldn't have been made in 1938 because of the scale of it, I don't think, but we hope that it harkens back to that era without alienating kids who might find it too odd or strange in terms of dialogue and things like that.

DAN: *Have you ever seen any of the old serials on which it's sort of based — KING OF THE ROCKET MEN and that sort of thing?*

PAUL: Oh, sure, and of course that's obviously influenced Dave's creation of the character, but he did make these characters his own, particularly by giving it the back story of being a stunt pilot and setting it in Hollywood and never really leaving the area.

DAN: *Is the Rocketeer a superhero, do you think?*

PAUL: I don't think I would classify him

"We've expanded from the basic seed of Dave's

as a superhero in the way that Superman or the Flash or somebody is . . .

DAN: *He's just a guy with a rocket pack?*

PAUL: Right. The only thing that gives him any kind of special advantage in overcoming the bad guys is the fact that the rocket pack gives him speed and a certain amount of secrecy, in that he can get from a place to another place very quickly. And it gives him the power, of course, to fly. Other than that, once he's flown and he's landed somewhere, then it's Cliff Secord and his fists, and whatever guts and fear and things he has to face, it's really as a human being. He is a pretty brave and brash guy, just based on what he did before he ever found a rocket pack. The personality that it takes to fly one of those planes, particularly in that era — you had to be a guy with a lot of guts. And I think that his brashness also is something within the film that, in a way, may be his flaw. And that's something that he has to overcome, and stop being so selfish as he starts out.

So he's kind of a superhero — in spite of himself — in that he doesn't have any special inhuman or superhuman ability the way some of the other guys do. He's more like an ordinary guy who suddenly comes into contact with this extraordinary machine. In a way there's a similarity to the Flash in that both of these characters start out as average joes, so to speak, and suddenly have this thing thrust upon them which turns them into heroes, whether they like it or not.

DAN: *What can you tell me about the story of THE ROCKETEER?*

PAUL: We've expanded from the basic seed of Dave's original story. Cliff is an air-racing pilot, as he is in the book. And the rocket pack in the film has been designed by **Howard Hughes,** who is a character in the movie . . .

DAN: *Oh, that's great! Good touch. I just saw a thing the other day on Hughes and the Spruce Goose. That was quite a wild, science-fictional thing for its time, too.*

PAUL: Oh, sure. So there's a little bit in the film where you get the idea that **Hughes** has developed the rocket pack for the military, or in conjunction with the military for research purposes, and that he also had it in mind to sort of premiere it at the 1939 World's Fair. The rocket pack is stolen by some gangsters who are in the employ of our bad guy, who is a British film actor who in reality is a Nazi agent. So we're kind of going off on the old rumors that **Errol Flynn** was a Nazi informant. We're using that as sort of the basis of the character. He's a kind of a combination between **Errol Flynn** and **George Sanders** — a swashbuckling but leading man, urbane type of caustic character.

DAN: *You know, in a sense this sounds to me like RAGTIME — going back into time manipulating historical figures . . .*

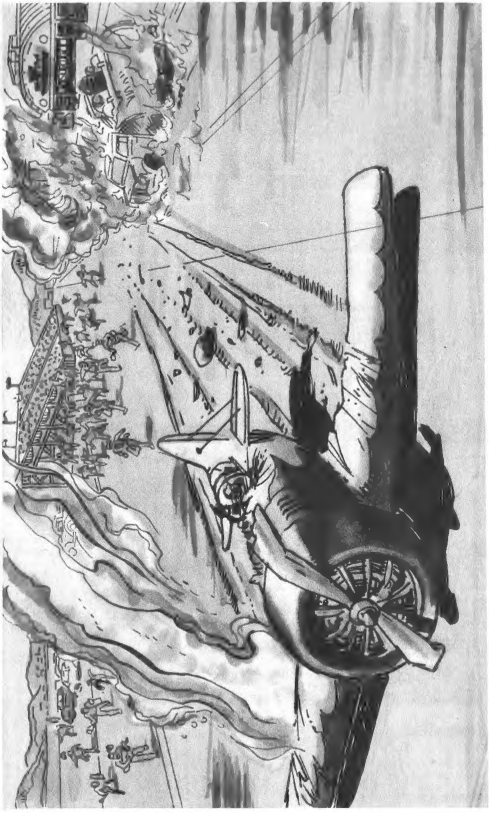
PAUL: We've played with that a little bit. We haven't dotted it with as many historical characters as RAGTIME did, but we do have a couple of cameos by movie stars within the story. So this film actor who's really the Nazi agent is after the rocket pack and, as in the comic, when the pack is stolen, it's chased by FBI agents and lost by the gangsters at the airstrip, where Cliff finds it. And once he gets his mitts on it, it's like, "Well, what am I going to do? Am I going to keep it? I don't know where it came from. Can I turn a buck with this thing?" And before you know it, he's gotten not only the **FBI** and **Howard Hughes** after him, but he's got gangsters and Nazis after him also — no uniformed Nazis, just enemy agents. You never see a guy in a monocle or a Nazi uniform, although they're definitely in the background manipulating what's going on.

And it all takes place in Hollywood, in Los Angeles. There's a big second-act action sequence where Cliff gets trapped inside this immense nightclub by gangsters. And, unless it's revised again, the climax takes place in Griffith Park when a zeppelin comes in to pick up the villain and the rocket pack. It ends up with Cliff having a fistfight on top of the blimp. It's a big action scene, a crazy thing with the zeppelin at the end which is a lot of fun.

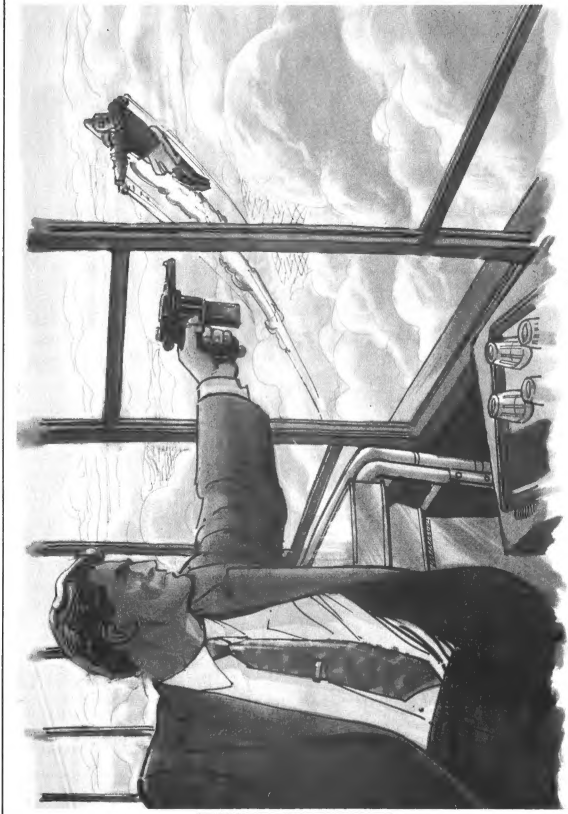
DAN: *Once again, the zeppelins were a wonderful '30s romantic thing you don't see anymore.*

PAUL: We've been trying to get the

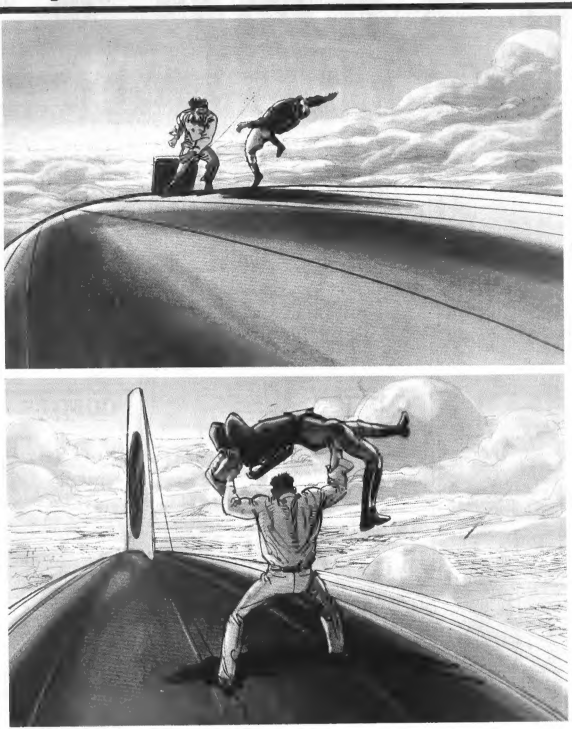
original story. Cliff is an air-racing pilot."



"There are three major action sequences."



"The production scale is larger than DICK TRACY."



zeppelin into the story since the beginning, because we thought it was a great ending. So there are three major action sequences — the ones I mentioned, and then the first appearance of the Rocketeer as the Rocketeer as in the comic book. He's forced to rescue Malcolm, the old flier, when his plane starts going down, and Cliff puts on the rocket and the helmet for the first time and actually flies with it.

DAN: *Sounds quite charming, all those elements with Hughes and the Hollywood heyday thing. You've got a lot to play with there.*

PAUL: I think it's a lot of fun, and it's going to be pretty lavish. I've seen a lot of the sets and a lot of the set designs. They're guilding things now. The Chaplin Airfield set is already up in Santa Maria, and they're building the

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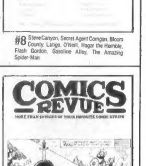

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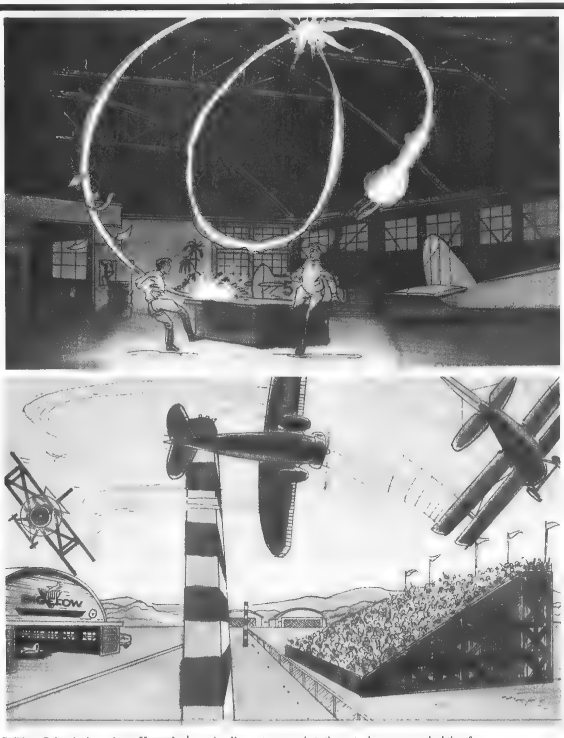
"We have a real good relationship with Joe Johnston."



Bulldog Cafe. And we have **Howard Hughes's** offices and we have the nightclub. It's going to be an incredible production. The production scale is actually larger than DICK TRACY. I've been told that this is the highest-budgeted film that Disney has ever made. I'm not sure what the actual number on it is. All I know is that it's going to cost more than DICK TRACY. The special effects budget alone is going to be immense. They're being done by ILM.

DAN: *Did Disney snap it up when you approached them?*

PAUL: What happened was, eventually when we met up with Dave, we told him what we wanted to do with the story and showed him a couple of the movies we'd done at Empire. Essentially, Dave allowed us to have a free option on the

On The Flash: "We're having him making his

story, and we went around to several studios and pitched it. And we sold the project to Disney and went to work on it. That was almost four years ago. So it's been a long trail, and of course we can't quite believe that it's finally going to go.

DAN: *You're quite busy guys now, doing a TV series for Warners and a movie for Disney at the same time.*

PAUL: Well, right now we're probably going to do one more pass on THE ROCKETEER script-wise, but we're not directly involved with the production of it. We're really only the writers on the project. **Larry** and **Chuck Gordon** are the producers. We do have a real good relationship with **Joe Johnston,** and we're able to throw our two cents in. But it's really their show. THE FLASH is *our* show, and it also looks pretty good that ABC is going to pick up some mid-season episodes for THE HUMAN TARGET. So, yeah, we're pretty busy.

DAN: *What's the status of production on THE FLASH now?*

PAUL: We start shooting a week from Monday for the one-hour episodes. Right now, I can see out my window the back lot set that they're putting up for us.

DAN: *You can see Central City out your window, eh?*

PAUL: Yeah, they're turning the New York street back here into Central City for us. We're putting up a facade of the police station, because we needed that, and we're also building some sets on the stages. We're going to rebuild both the crime lab and Barry's apartment. We'll be shooting on the lot and around town.

DAN: *Is that what you've been writing lately, scripts for THE FLASH?*

PAUL: We've been supervising the writing of the scripts.

DAN: *How many constitutes a season these days?*

PAUL: We have a firm order for 12-13 including the pilot. We've got about half a dozen scripts in various stages of writing right now, plus a few more stories underway. That's our firm commitment. Of course, we hope we get the full season. It looks real good.

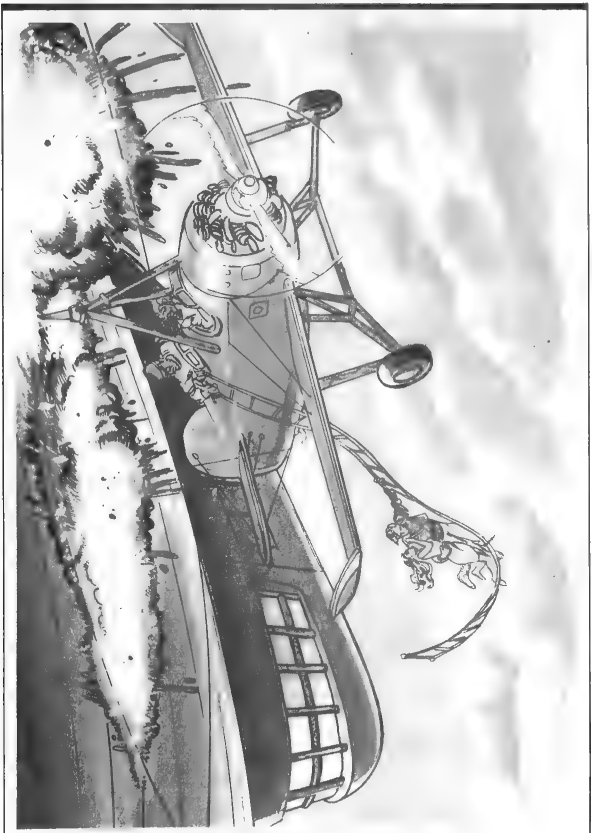
DAN: *From what Danny Bilson told me, it sounds like your approach is interesting.*

PAUL: Well, I think we're pretty faithful to the tone and the general origin of the story. As fans of this stuff, we're trying real hard to give the show its own look and feel and not make it silly or foolish or spoofy the way these things have been done on television before. We're really trying to present an equivalent on television to what's being done in comic books these days.

The fan reaction to the promo has been great, and DC Comics are really behind us on the project. They can see that we're using the proper amount of reverence, you know. I think that part of the trick is to take this initial reverence for the show, but then step back from it. Because you don't want to get so tied up in being faithful to something that really can't work 100 percent on television when you try to dramatize it. Just using it as a springboard and going on from there. I think that our approach is more towards MAX HEADROOM or even something like CRIME STORY with a superhero involved, rather than the old BATMAN or WONDER WOMAN or HULK, any of those approaches.

We're trying to create stories that have some reasonable content to them. Sometimes the villains are going to be out there, sometimes not. The constant thing we come up against, if we try to get a little extreme with the stories, someone might say, "Well, I don't know. Gee, guys, that

appearances at night. He's more like a phantom."



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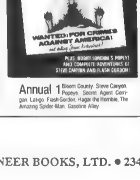

Annual 1 Bloom County Steve Canyon Peplum Secret Agent Corrigan Lango Flash Gordon Hagar the Horrible, The Amazing Spider-Man Gasoline Alley

#22 Bloom County Secret Agent Corrigan The Amazing Spider-Man Hagar the Horrible Steve Canyon Flash Gordon Gasoline Alley

#23 The Amazing Spider-Man Bloom County Secret Agent Corrigan, Lango, Steve Canyon, Hagar the Horrible Flash Gordon Gasoline Alley

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"Let's not talk about unbelievable here."

villain's a little unbelievable." But we've got a guy who runs faster than a train . . .

DAN: *Exactly.*

PAUL: Let's not talk about unbelievable here. But the other thing we're trying to do is present Central City itself as sort of like a slightly alternate reality.

DAN: *A place where unlikely things happen, eh?*

PAUL: Where we can make our own rules and create our own city and sort of give this slightly off-kilter framework for the stories where you think it's happening here and now, but it's not quite. The art direction and the look of the city is very specific. You'll see cars from the '40s and '50s and '60s, but you won't see any cars from the '70s and '80s. And you'll see cars from the '90s. The technology will be very up-to-date, or beyond up-to-date. And you'll see guys walking around in overcoats and fedoras at the same time you see people dressed in a very modern, eccentric fashion. So we're going for this kind of weird mix of things.

DAN: *I'm eager to see it. I was thinking, too, about the plotting difficulties of writing THE FLASH. It seems to me that a character who has super speed would just basically overwhelm his foes and that would be that.*

PAUL: Well, sure. That's something we're coming up against every episode.

DAN: *How do you resolve that sort of thing? That takes some clever writing, I would think.*

PAUL: Well, sure, but I think you also start it off with some rules and regulations for everybody. I think the first thing we had to do was not make Barry so omnipotent,. There have to be limits to his powers. He's not as all-powerful as he was in the Barry Allen version of the strip to where he was able to vibrate through walls and go at unlimited speed and approach and pass the speed of light and apparently sustain whatever speed he has for unlimited time. So what we did was, we combined some of the elements from the Wally West character, where his body pays a debt for the things he does, where he's got to replenish his energy with food and he's got to rest and can't sustain a high speed for more than a brief period. And the powers that we set up in the pilot are still volatile, and there are still maybe going to be some side effects that he doesn't know about, which helps keep Tina involved in the stories with him.

DAN: *Even so, it would seem to me once he gets into a fight, it's over. You have to have 'some way to overcome that, to make the villain a challenge for him.*

PAUL: Right. That's the big challenge of the show. How do you come up with a worthy adversary? You can either outwit him, or psychologically screw him up or simply elude him. Because the Flash can't go running after somebody and look for him if he doesn't know where to look. And if his back is turned, you can conk him over the head. And if you shoot a bullet at him and he doesn't see it coming, he's a dead guy. So there are all those things that we have to build in to make it stretch over more than one episode. They've been doing this character for more than 50 years, and you can't use the solutions that they rely on in the comic books because they're too whimsical for television.

DAN: *Exactly.*

PAUL: As of yet, we don't have any villains that, in and of themselves, have a super power. We have one villain who is doing genetic mutation research. It's almost a Jekyll and Hyde type villain. But the other characters really that he comes up against are either extremely

"You don't have a guy out there who's got an

clever and ruthless criminals or have got some kind of machinery or device that assists them in doing what they're trying to do. But you don't have a guy out there who's got an ability that's unhuman like Barry does — at least not for now. Talk to me again when we start getting desperate.

DAN: *What's the appeal of superhero characters, do you think?*

PAUL: My own personal theory is that the superheroes of comics fiction and film and pulp fiction have kind of taken over for the mythological figures that used to capture the imagination of people back to the beginning of time. I think that there's an innate need in people to fantasize and, especially when you're young, to believe that there are beings out there who go beyond the limit of what an ordinary mortal can do. I

ability that's unhuman — at least not for now."

think it's good to have an ideal or a hero that can be ultra-moral or ultra-strong, that doesn't have to have the flaws that we have as human beings. But what you're finding in these latest revisionist characterizations of these heroes is you're starting to find heroes with flaws who are reacting like human beings.

But I think there's a psychological, built-in trigger in human beings for myths, for these figures that walk above the world. The writers who originally created the superheroes in the '30s and '40s and even those writing now fall back on the same kind of powers and abilities and attributes that the gods of old had . . .

DAN: *Even the plot devices. Superman is cast upon the waters of space, as Moses and Perseus were in the river and the sea.*

PAUL: And the Flash is Mercury.

"Did you think I'd make anything off this baloney?"

All these characters, particularly the ultra-human ones, have their seeds in those mythological figures, the pantheon of the gods. And I think the way these stories have the most appeal, even the ancient ones, were when these figures came to Earth and walked among us and changed our lives. Which is what the superheroes, the most successful ones, do.

DAN: *And therein lies part of the appeal of the double identity?*

PAUL: Sure, and that goes way back. That is as ancient as Zeus or Odin coming to Earth and disguising themselves as beggars, or the angels from Judeo-Christian mythology, any of those figures who came to Earth and walked among us. Jesus, of course, is an obvious example, depending on how you mythologize him or not, depending on what your beliefs are. But it's the same thing, only his abilities were not about knocking down walls.

DAN: *And there's a psychological kick in the double identity thing.*

PAUL: Oh, sure, and that's something we're trying to get into with the stories about the Flash. We have one story **Howard Chaykin** and **John Moore** wrote which is specifically about someone trying to uncover Barry's secret identity and the hell that it causes him. So it's a big part of the plot, Barry having to don the mask in order to protect the lives of loved ones and himself.

DAN: *Not too much has been done with that on TV . . .*

PAUL: They always kind of take it for granted, and we're trying to deal with the things that you always ask yourself. "Gee, they've got Batman knocked out, why don't they take his fucking mask off and see who he is?" We actually had a scene in the pilot that we cut out where these guys have captured Barry and one of them goes, "Let's rip his mask off and see who he is." And they pull his mask up and they say, "Gee, who is he?"

DAN: *They wouldn't know, would they?*

PAUL: It's not like he's millionnaire philanthropist Bruce Wayne who's on the front page of every newspaper. So we'll do something fun with that.

DAN: *It always occurs to you, too, how difficult it would be to maintain a secret identity.*

PAUL: God willing, as we go into the second season, we may find ourselves faced with an episode where we say, "Hell with it. Let's have him just say, 'Hey, this is who I am. I'm not wearing the mask anymore. Forget it, it's too much trouble.'" Which would be a weird step for this kind of show, but I think we've got to keep doing things like that to keep fresh.

But it's another reason why, besides making the suit look better and more mysterious, we're having him making his appearances at night. He's more like a phantom figure. He's more like a legendary thing that's happening within the city. I think it will be a while before he's fully acknowledged and making public appearances. For the time being, he's kind of like the Loch Ness Monster. Some people have seen him, some people haven't. Is he real, is he not? It's a lot of fun to do that way, at least initially.

DAN: *And for you and Danny Bilson, I guess when you were boys these would have been the perfect jobs to grow up and have, right?*

PAUL: Oh, sure. I always get a laugh by remembering the time my mother went on a rampage through the house. She couldn't stand it anymore, I was leaving them all over the place, spending too much idle time with my nose buried in a comic book, and she just said, "That's it." She threw 'em out, ripped 'em up. So every so often when I see her now, I say, "Gee, ma, remember when you tore up those comic books? Did you ever think I'd be making anything off this baloney?"

"I had been doing a cute bunny rabbit strip."

KYLE BAKER

Although Kyle Baker is only 24 years old, he is already considered in some circles one of the most distinctive and innovative artists to enter the comics medium in the past decade. Kyle has drawn titles for Marvel, DC and First, among others. He recently completed the three-issue DICK TRACY mini-series for Disney's new comics company . . .

ROBERT ROWE: *You once worked for noted graphic designer Milton Glaser. How'd that come about?*

KYLE BAKER: That happened because **Milton Glaser** is on the board of something or other at the School of Visual Arts. He likes to give students of SVA jobs, because he's an OK guy. So he called up the alumni society and asked if they had anybody who could draw cute bunny rabbits, because he was doing these children's books that he really didn't want to work on.

I had been doing a cute bunny rabbit

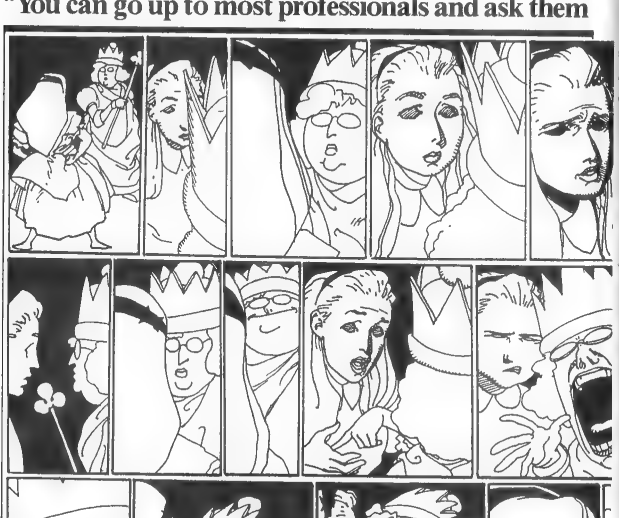
Dick Tracy art from the Walt Disney adaptation of the film: John Moore, writer. Kyle Baker, artist, with Len Wein as editor-in-chief.

VITAL STATISTICS

Name: Kyle Baker
Born: 13 December 1965 — Queens, NY
Occupation: Artist
Art Education: New York School of Visual Arts. I think I dropped out in the middle of my third year.
First Professional Comic Book Credit: THE TRANSFORMERS #7, August, 1985. Inking only

Dick Tracy © 1990 Tribune Media Services Inc. / Spider-Man © 1990 M.E.G. / The Joker © 1990 DC Comics Inc. / The Shadow and The Avenger © 1990 Conde Nast Publishers
Cowboy Wash © 1989 Kyle Baker / Death Encounter © 1989 Fred Schiller and Kyle Baker

"You can go up to most professionals and ask them



strip in the school paper, so even though I wasn't technically an alumnus — because I dropped out — they gave me his number. It was a good job.

ROBERT: *How long did you work for him?*

KYLE: I think it was about six or seven months.

ROBERT: *It's a big operation he has, isn't it?*

KYLE: It's a *gigantic* operation, the operation I want to have; that's my ultimate goal.

He has this entire brownstone, four floors. The first floor is the reception area, and a lot of paste-up and mechanical art is done down there. Then further up there's publication design. The floor above that is Grand Union. *(Laughter.)* He does all the Grand Union stuff.

ROBERT: *I'm not familiar with —*

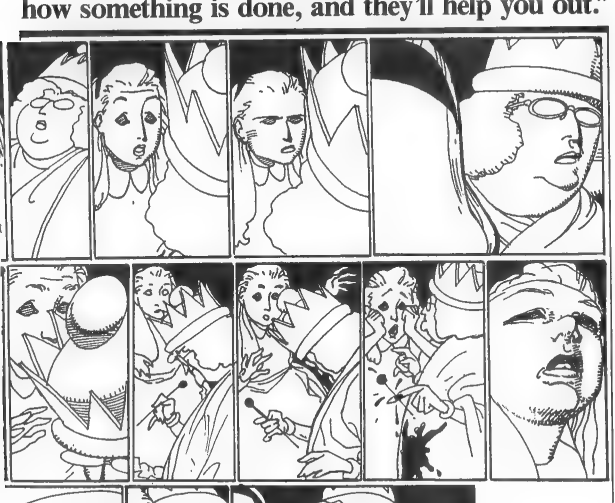
KYLE: It's a big supermarket chain. He designed the logo for Grand Union. You know how grocery stores have their own food? Well, he does Grand Union napkins, Grand Union potato chips . .

ROBERT: *Our New York City readers will get a kick out of that. Milton Glaser worked on the current DC Comics logo, didn't he?*

KYLE: He worked on the DC logo. He did "I ♥ NY." He does everything.

ROBERT: *What did you learn from*

how something is done, and they'll help you out."



A complete 26-panel sequence from First Comics/Classics Illustrated adaptation of Lewis Carroll's THROUGH THE LOOKING GLASS. These panels are from the uncorrected publicity copy.

working for him that has served you well since?

KYLE: That's where I got my education, at least my practical education. Now I pretty much know all the steps involved in putting together a printed book. So, like on DICK TRACY or THROUGH THE LOOKING GLASS or everything after that, I do pretty much everything: I do the mechanicals, I do the actual typesetting, and I designed the typeface. I get to pick the process because I know all different kinds of printing processes, so I can figure out which one would best serve which book.

ROBERT: *I get the feeling you left SVA because the training was less practical than the real-world stuff.*

KYLE: It's not that. It was just very hectic. See, I'd gotten into comic books to pay for school. You don't have to be very good to get a job in comics. But then that took up all my time, and I seemed to be getting a good enough education just from doing the real stuff.

People are very nice. You can go up to most professionals and ask them how something is done, and they'll help you out.

ROBERT: *That's good. Do you recall your first comic book sale?*

KYLE: Well, I worked as an assistant to **Joe Rubinstein** and as an assistant to

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"I worked for free in the Marvel Comics mail room."

Vince Colletta doing backgrounds. That was my plan. Doing backgrounds was really easy money. You could do them fast, and they'd pay pretty good. I could crank out a whole bunch of stuff before going to school. You know, wake up a couple of hours early . . .

ROBERT: *Right.*

KYLE: But then I started inking THE TRANSFORMERS. That's pretty easy money, too. *(Laughter.)*

ROBERT: *Depending on the penciller or —?*

KYLE: You don't have to think. You just lay the line down on top of the pencils. Again, I'd wake up at 4:00 in the morning and ink two whole pages. It'd take me an hour and a half, then I'd go running out of the house at 7:00 and jump on the train and go to school.

ROBERT: *Whose pencils were you inking on THE TRANSFORMERS?*

KYLE: William Johnson.

ROBERT: *So, you were in school, and you took your portfolio up to Marvel to —*

KYLE: I had no portfolio. I was working in the mailroom at Marvel Comics. In my senior year of high school, they had this program where you either have to get a job or take another class.

I took the job. *(Laughter.)*

ROBERT: *Sure.*

KYLE: Anyway, I had some cartoons, and I was showing them to various artists. A lot of those young guys are very helpful, and **Joe Rubinstein** thought I had some talent. He needed an assistant, so . . .

ROBERT: *What high school did you attend?*

KYLE: Hunter College High School.

ROBERT: *And how did that program work exactly?*

KYLE: Basically, if you call anybody up and offer to work there for free, you'll probably get a job. *(Laughter.)*

I worked for free in the mailroom, and at the end of the year I'd get a letter of recommendation and two credits on my transcripts.

ROBERT: *What did you do in the mailroom?*

KYLE: Answer the fan mail or make sure to forward the fan mail. Like, if the letter was addressed to Spider-Man, you'd send them some free comic books or a poster or whatever you had in the office at the time. And if the letter was addressed to **Chris Claremont,** you made sure **Chris Claremont** would get it.

ROBERT: *What was the next big step for you after THE TRANSFORMERS?*

KYLE: This is why I never had a portfolio — and still don't. I'm trying to get one put together, but I never have time. If you're working for **Joe Rubinstein** and **Vinnie Colletta,** that's pretty much enough of a resume, you know? So one of the editors - **Jim Owsley,** a very nice guy — naturally assumed I was an inker. *(Laughter.)* "Hey, you're working for Joe and Vinnie, so you're an inker."

ROBERT: *Right.*

KYLE: And I had no idea what an inker did or anything. He put me on THE WEB OF SPIDER-MAN, and **Ann Nocenti** put me on THE NEW MUTANTS. I was inking both of those at the same time.

The first book I did pencilling for was HOWARD THE DUCK: THE MOVIE.

ROBERT: *And you inked it?*

KYLE: Yeah. It's terrible. *(Laughter.)*

ROBERT: *But you've gotten very good since. What accounts for that development?*

KYLE: For the first three or four years I was working, I got a lot of grief from

I'M SURE I COULD CATCH UP TO HIM-- IF I REALLY PUT MY HEART INTO IT--
--BUT, WHY BOTHER?
HE'D ONLY FAST-TALK D.A. TOWER INTO GIVING HIM THE KEYS TO THE CITY, AGAIN!

From late 1985, Kyle Baker inks Sal Buscema's pencils, from SPIDEY #272.

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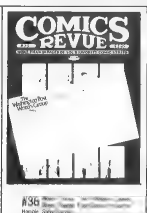

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"I pretty much supervise everything on my own books."

everybody — not, of course, from the people who were actually giving me work, but the people who ran the companies. I had come up with a very distinctive way of what I wanted my book to look like, and nobody trusted me.

If you do something new, nobody believes you're doing it on purpose. For instance, the stuff I'm doing now has no variation in line weight.

ROBERT: *Like DICK TRACY?*

KYLE: Yeah. You know how most comic books have thick lines and thin lines because they're all done with a brush?

ROBERT: *Yes.*

KYLE: I generally use the same line weight. I've been using markers for the past two years.

Again, nobody believes you really want to do that, and they try and teach you how to make the lines thick and thin. *(Laughter.)*

ROBERT: *You have to show them.*

KYLE: Yeah. If they've never seen it before, you have to show them that you really meant it. Also, I'm young, and they're trying to help me out, giving me art tips, and I'm trying to sort out which ones were really legitimate and which ones are them not getting it.

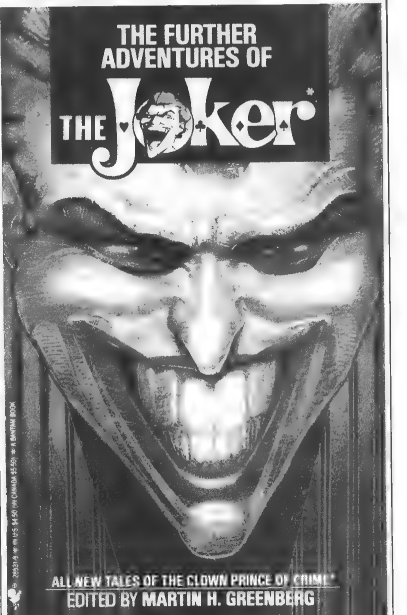
So I got really confused from trying to walk this line between the standard comic book style and what I really wanted to do. It got to the point where it was looking bad, because you can't do two different styles at the same time.

I finally gave up on it. I pretty much dropped out of comic books. I was doing THE COWBOY WALLY SHOW, a book for Doubleday. I figured, "This is my book. Nobody can give me any grief." There's no house style or anything. When you're working on Cowboy Wally, nobody can tell you you're doing it wrong. Nobody can say, "That doesn't look like Cowboy Wally," although they have every right to say, "That doesn't look like Spider-Man."

So I did COWBOY WALLY the way I had been trying to do stuff for years, which everyone kept rejecting and redrawing. I had a lot of stuff where it was given to other people and redrawn. If you look at those WEB OF SPIDER-MANs, a lot of the heads are pasted on — by other people.

I did COWBOY WALLY exactly the way I wanted to do it. It came out, and all of a sudden everybody in comics looked at it and said, "Oh, that's what he meant. I guess he *can* do that." *(Laughter.)*

ROBERT: *So, COWBOY WALLY made people look at your work differently.*



Cover illustration for Bantam Books' THE FURTHER ADVENTURES OF THE JOKER, by Baker.

Nobody tries to give you tips now, do they?

KYLE: No.

ROBERT: *Because they know what you're doing.*

KYLE: They know that I know what I'm doing. I'm pretty much supervising everything on my books now.

COWBOY WALLY was a real lucky break. It was stuff I'd been trying to sell for years. COWBOY WALLY was originally something I was trying to sell as a newspaper strip. That's why it's so choppy.

ROBERT: *COWBOY WALLY was supposed to be a weekly, like FEIFFER?*

KYLE: No. They were four-panel gags strung together.

ROBERT: *Is there going to be another COWBOY WALLY book?*

KYLE: Yes, as a matter of fact. I don't know who I'm doing it with yet. There's a bidding war going on. I don't know how *that* happened.

"It hadn't hit me that I was going to be called

ROBERT: *You mean like Doubleday and —*

KYLE: Doubleday is out of comics. Doubleday wanted to do comics but had no idea how to, so they just stopped doing them. They were doing AMERICAN SPLENDOR.

ROBERT: *Right*

KYLE: AMERICAN SPLENDOR got written up in the VILLAGE VOICE and THE NEW YORK TIMES and got a lot of really good press. **Harvey Pekar** was on LATE NIGHT WITH DAVID LETTERMAN something like four times. Now, if you've got a guy getting this much press, and he's on a huge network television show four times, and you still can't sell his book, it's time to get out of comics. They didn't know what to do

ROBERT: *What else did you do after you dropped out of comics?*

KYLE: I did a lot of advertising. I worked for RCA Record Club for a while. The ads still come out. There's a cartoon of these two kids talking about the cool deal they got on records

ROBERT: *I'll look for that.*

KYLE: Yeah, it comes out in TV GUIDE a lot. That paid well.

When I was working on THE WEB OF SPIDER-MAN and THE NEW MUTANTS, these two books were in the Top 10 — not because of me, just because they were in the Top 10 *(Laughter.)* So, I made all this money. The next year I got out of comics and did COWBOY WALLY and a lot of advertising stuff and made considerably less money. But I had to pay taxes on the SPIDER-MAN money, and I had just moved. So I had no money by the time I finished COWBOY WALLY; I was completely broke.

Mike Carlin called me up and asked if I'd ink a fill-in issue of THE SHADOW. I asked him if I could have the series, because I was starving to death. That's the only reason I got back into comics. *(Laughter.)*

I brought in COWBOY WALLY to DC, and I said, "This is how I draw now. I hope you don't mind." They said, "Sure. Do that." *(Laughter.)*

ROBERT: *THE SHADOW had quite a run, but the last story didn't finish —*

KYLE: It is finished.

ROBERT: *It is?*

KYLE: I say it is

Yeah, there's a couple of stories — loose ends — that weren't wrapped up, but the main storyline was finished. If **Andy Helfer** ever wants to write that last book, or if DC ever wants to publish it, I'd do it. But as far as I'm concerned, it's not unfinished.

ROBERT: *Did you draw anything beyond issue #19, the last one published?*

KYLE: I did a cover

Andy is real slow as a writer. So we started this thing where I'd do the covers first, and then he'd be locked into the story.

He'd say, "I've got an idea. We'll turn the Shadow into a robot." I'd do a robot cover so he'd be forced to actually write that story. Because (otherwise) he'd keep fine-tuning it and fine-tuning it. If that had been my only job at the time, I would've starved to death waiting for Andy.

ROBERT: *You also worked with him on JUSTICE, INC. Explain how you did the art.*

KYLE: When you do color books with line art, it's hard to get the registration right. Usually, these things are done with a blueline process. Basically, the thing is shot onto two plates: one is the black plate, and one is colored in. But they never got it right. There's always a little shift; the art gets fuzzy.

The other way they've tried is coloring directly on photostats, and that looks bad. There's no way to do line art and color without something weird looking.

So, I thought if I did the color art on a board and then did the line art on an overlay, there wouldn't be any double line when the plates shifted.

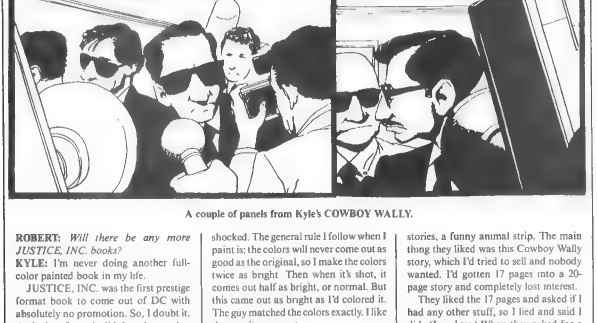
ROBERT: *What sort of painting was that?*

KYLE: I started off the first 20 pages of the first issue with oil paint. Then I realized it was going to take forever, because Andy writes eight panels to a page minimum. And, I'd never painted a book. I'd painted covers and stuff. For some reason it hadn't hit me that I was going to be called upon to do, basically, almost 2,000 covers.

It was too ambitious, and the book came out late. The rest of the book was painted with watercolor

The Shadow, from DC Comics, by Andy Helfer with illustrations by Baker.

upon to do, basically, almost 2,000 covers."



A couple of panels from Kyle's COWBOY WALLY.

ROBERT: *Will there be any more JUSTICE, INC. books?*

KYLE: I'm never doing another full-color painted book in my life.

JUSTICE, INC. was the first prestige format book to come out of DC with absolutely no promotion. So, I doubt it. And a lot of people didn't understand it. Again, you look at something, and it doesn't look like anything else, so you assume it's a mistake.

People would come up to me and say, "What happened with JUSTICE, INC.? Was there a problem with the printing?" And I'd say, "No, I painted it that way." *(Laughter.)* And there is a precedent, just not in comics. I don't pull this stuff out of the ether.

ROBERT: *You were influenced by what? Ad art?*

KYLE: Yeah. A painter whose stuff I've always liked is **Mark English.** His stuff is very airy and soft, out of focus. I think it's cute and a nice look. Basically, what I was trying to do was a **Mark English** thing with an outline. People didn't think I'd put it out of focus intentionally. *(Laughter.)*

ROBERT: *You did a black and white piece for ASYLUM #2. How'd that come about?*

KYLE: I guess they called me up and asked me to do it. *(Laughter.)*

ROBERT: *Now we're up to THROUGH THE LOOKING GLASS.*

KYLE: I got a lot of grief for JUSTICE, INC. A lot of people didn't get it. So I decided not to do anything creative on THROUGH THE LOOKING GLASS. It's basically line art colored in, which is the way normal comics are done. I took a marker, did the drawings, and colored them in with Dr. Martin's color dyes and Pantone color film.

The seps on this were wonderful. I was shocked. The general rule I follow when I paint is: the colors will never come out as good as the original, so I make the colors twice as bright. Then when it's shot, it comes out half as bright, or normal. But this came out as bright as I'd colored it. The guy matched the colors exactly. I like the way it came out.

ROBERT: *Tell me about WHY I HATE SATURN.*

KYLE: It's another one of my books, a comedy about two sisters who can't stand each other. I find the easiest way to write is to put the characters into situations in which they don't belong, and the comedy comes out of that.

I have a lot of trouble with synopses. I have a hell of a time pitching stories, because when I tell people these stories, they just don't think they're going to be any good. The symopsis to COWBOY WALLY was four pages long. They really trusted me on that; it was pretty funny.

ROBERT: *How did you find a publisher for COWBOY WALLY?*

KYLE: I had been trying to sell strips of mine for years. That was what I wanted to do. I always wanted to write and draw my own stuff. Nobody wanted the stuff.

When THE DARK KNIGHT RETURNS and MAUS hit, there were all these articles coming out about how comics were the new thing and big money. So all the major publishing houses were trying to get into comics and didn't know anything about comics, which is why all the books bombed.

A friend of mine, **Ron Fontes,** who worked at Marvel when I was working there, had a friend who was an editor at Doubleday. The editor was saying they were trying to get into comics, so they gave me a call. I gave them Xeroxes of everything, because I had done all different kinds of strips and stuff: short stories, a funny animal strip. The main thing they liked was this Cowboy Wally story, which I'd tried to sell and nobody wanted. I'd gotten 17 pages into a 20-page story and completely lost interest.

They liked the 17 pages and asked if I had any other stuff, so I lied and said I did. *(Laughter.)* When they asked for a synopsis, I wrote the four pages off the top of my head. It made no sense, and I had to get a book out of it after. The synopsis had four pages, so that's why the book has four chapters.

The only reason HAMLET is in there is because I thought, "If I get stuck, I'll have HAMLET to fall back on because it's already written. All I have to do is put the actors in."

ROBERT: *Will WHY I HATE SATURN be published in installments?*

KYLE: No. I always try to do stuff that I would read. That's my problem- I don't read comics, which is why my stuff never works. *(Laughter.)*

ROBERT: *But I think a lot of creators — like Howard Chaykin, say — get their creative strength from reading books and not comics.*

KYLE: Yeah, but with the exception of Howard, we all fail miserably in the comics field because of it.

I'm doing a lot better, because I'm getting jobs that are seen outside, like THROUGH THE LOOKING GLASS and COWBOY WALLY. Those are available in bookstores, where people are more inclined to understand it. And DICK TRACY will be in bookstores, so it will be seen by people who don't read comics.

I can't follow a story over the course of six months. There's no way to get any sort of dramatic pacing. Say you build tension — it's 30 days before the next one comes out. The tension is gone.

"I don't think anybody has more words on a page

AYE, 'N' THAT'S ALL I'LL BE NEEDIN', MISTER AVENGER, SIR..
THE BONNY LITTLE THIN' IS IN ME GRASP
ALL THAT REMAINS IS A DEFT LITTLE TWIST O' THE WRIST--
--AN' WE'RE WELL ON THE ROAD TO FREEDOM AT LAST!
WELL DONE, MAC. REMIND ME TO SHOW YOU HOW TO THROW GOOD OLD MIKE ONE OF THESE DAYS
HIS SENSE OF BALANCE IS REALLY QUITE EXTRAORDINARY
SURE, BOSS, SURE I'LL BE HOPPY T'MASTER THE TOSS... NOW THET I'VE ALREADY LEARNED THE ROPES--
EH? HOOT, MON-- WHAT D'YE THINK YOURE DOIN'? WE'VE GOT T'BE GETTIN' OUT BEFORE SHE BLOWS!
YOU GO AHEAD, MAC
I'VE DONE SOME DEFUSING IN MY TIME-- AND I SUSPECT THAT IF I CAN SALVAGE THE BOMB, IT MAY GIVE US SOME VALUABLE CLUES TO HOW WE CAN FIND DOC KAZP...

Here and next page, work from JUSTICE INC. by Helfer and Baker featuring Kenneth Robeson's creation The Avenger.

ROBERT: *I know exactly what you mean.*

KYLE: I finally got around to reading BLACK KISS, because I couldn't follow it every month.

ROBERT: *Me neither*

KYLE: I bought the three anthologies, BIG BLACK KISS, and read those in one day. A beautiful book. **Howard Chaykin** is my hero.

ROBERT: *He is wonderful. I understand he likes your work, too.*

KYLE: He's my pal. He's very nice to me.

ROBERT: *He wanted that Blackhawk cover you did for ACTION COMICS WEEKLY.*

KYLE: Yeah. It was stolen, I think.

ROBERT: *Is there going to be a COWBOY WALLY movie?*

KYLE: If Howard can sell it, then there will be a COWBOY WALLY movie.

ROBERT: *Cowboy Wally's face is a movie image if ever there was one.*

KYLE: He's a really weird character. The thing I like about him is that there's a very definite, archetypal shape to him. *(Laughter.)*

ROBERT: *He doesn't look like anybody else.*

KYLE: It's a mark of most successful cartoon characters that they have a very recognizable shape. Mickey Mouse doesn't look like Mighty Mouse, you know? Also, Cowboy Wally is the only character of mine who has a costume. Most of my characters are just guys. *(Laughter.)*

ROBERT: *WHY I HATE SATURN is a one-shot book.*

KYLE: Yeah, 200 pages, coming out in May from Piranha

ROBERT: *So you own it.*

KYLE: Yeah. I can't do any more work-for-hire. It's stupid.

WHY I HATE SATURN is two-color: black and white line art with a halftone dropped in as a second color. It's done the same way as JUSTICE, INC. except in two colors.

ROBERT: *How'd you get involved with DICK TRACY?*

KYLE: **Howard Chaykin** turned it down. When Howard turns down a job, he says, "Call Kyle." He's a wonderful man and a very nice guy. A DICK TRACY adaptation wouldn't have done his career any good.

ROBERT: *He's already big.*

KYLE: He's already big. But it can really help *me* out. DICK TRACY was blue-line. I did marker drawings, they shot bluelines of it, and I colored it in with nine tubes of paint in different colors. I wanted it to be really bright. I didn't mix paints at all except for a purple-gray, which I didn't use much, except for dirt and stuff that would've looked weird orange. *(Laughter.)*

ROBERT: *What did you think of the first issue?*

KYLE: All things considered, I think it came out very well. **Bob Foster,** the editor, is very nice. This is another case where I did the thing, and nobody understood what I was doing.

ROBERT: *Even after THE COWBOY WALLY SHOW and JUSTICE, INC.?*

KYLE: At Disney, nobody reads comics.

ROBERT: *Oh, that's right. They just started to publish their own material.*

KYLE: They looked at it and said,

than I do. I really like the look of my own lettering."

"What the hell is this? This isn't Dick Tracy. And **Bob Foster** stood by me. He was very nice about it. Bob fought for me.

ROBERT: *DICK TRACY is Disney's own first release, isn't it?*

KYLE: Yeah.

ROBERT: *That's a real honor.*

KYLE: That's a real risk. *(Laughter.)*

ROBERT: *How did you come up with your own typeface?*

KYLE: I do my own lettering. I did all the hand lettering on COWBOY WALLY. I also tend to be the most copy-heavy writer, as far as I know. I don't think anybody has more words on a page than I do. I really like the look of my own lettering. I think it's important.

ROBERT: *It's being the complete cartoonist.*

KYLE: If you look at **Charles Schulz**. . . I mean, can you imagine anyone else lettering PEANUTS?

ROBERT: *I know what you mean.*

KYLE: It would just look really queer. **Jules Feiffer** does his own lettering. **Walt Kelly**, when he didn't do his own lettering, at least supervised it. But considering the volume of work I'm doing right now, I don't have time to letter it myself. So I drew it into the computer.

ROBERT: *How does that work?*

KYLE: A lot of these small publishers are doing more and more of their own typesetting with these new laser printers. It's repro quality.

ROBERT: *So DICK TRACY is your hand lettering processed on a computer into a typeface.*

KYLE: Yeah. You can buy typefaces, but I drew my own.

ROBERT: *Do you have a name for it?*

KYLE: Bakerface. There's a whole bunch of faces I've got in the computer right now, including a display face for sound effects. You print it at the size you need, cut it up, and glue it on the pages.

ROBERT: *Can you register Bakerface?*

KYLE: I'm trying to find out.

ROBERT: *Designing a typeface sounds like something Milton Glaser would do.*

KYLE: He probably does. Working for **Milton Glaser** really inspired me. The reason his stuff looks so good is that he supervises every aspect of it. Even if he doesn't do it himself, it's done in-house and he has control over it, so it's all a consistent look.

That's what I'm trying to do now: all my books, no matter who the publisher is, have a consistency to them.

ROBERT: *You have two assistants now?*

KYLE: Three. I had a lot of help coloring DICK TRACY. But, again, you can't tell which pages I did and which pages I didn't, because I at least supervised it.

ROBERT: *What kind of markers do you use?*

KYLE: Whatever waterproof marker is on sale. Right now I'm using ultra-fine permanent Pilot pens. COWBOY WALLY was done with a dip pen.

ROBERT: *Who inspired you as an artist — say, when you were attending SVA?*

KYLE: I went to the School of Visual Arts because I failed chemistry. *(Laughter.)* I wanted to be a doctor, and it was too late to make it up, so there was no way I was going to get into any kind of decent school.

So I gave that up. Now, I'd always been drawing, but I never considered making any money at it, because very few people do make money at it.

ROBERT: *So you didn't grow up aching to draw comics?*

COMING, DEAREST! CAN'T LEAVE WITHOUT TICKETS! CAN YOU IMAGINE GETTING ALL THE WAY TO THE AIRPORT--WITHOUT THE BLASTED TICKETS?!
RICHARD-- NOT IN FRONT OF THE CHILD!
WHOOPS-- SORRY, MY LOVE.
THIS IS JUST WHAT WE NEED... A FEW DAYS OF REST AND RELAXATION... A NICE LITTLE FAMILY TRIP...
I HEAR MONTREAL IS BEAUTIFUL THIS TIME OF THE YEAR...
DADDY, WE GONNA FLY IN THE AIRPLANE?
YES, SWEETHEART...
AIRPORT, DRIVER.
HEY! YOU'RE RICHARD BENSON, AIN'T YOU?
I READ ABOUT YOU IN ARROGY! LAST OF THE BIG GAME HUNTERS! HOW'S IT FEEL TO BAG A WILD ELEPHANT, HUH? PRETTY GOOD, I BET...
IT'S A CHALLENGE.
SO, WHERE YOU OFF TO THIS TIME? BACK TO THE VELDT? INDIA? THE AMAZON?
NOT THIS TIME, FRIEND. PURELY SIGHT-SEEING FOR US. THE ONLY GAME WE'LL BE HUNTING IS A GOOD STEAK DINNER...
WILDWILD A

"Then I got an offer to ink Steve Ditko."

SHE FRENCH KISSES THE REAPER—
OKAY...OKAY... THEY GET THE IDEA!
HANG ON TO YOUR GAZITERS EMILY, THIS IS GOING TO BE WILD!
SKATCH SKATCH
PREPARE TO DIE, PRINCESS POLYGRIP!
GAAAH!

From New Comics Group's ASYLUM #2. Story by Fred Schiller . . . Death Enchanted.

KYLE: No. A lot of big companies deal almost exclusively with people who have wanted to work for them since birth. The problem with that is the companies don't have to treat you with any kind of respect or pay you.

I only do comics because it's fun, because there's more money in other areas of art. Basically, I now work for whatever company will let me have the most fun. I always get these calls — "We want you to work on so-and-so character" — and I have no interest. I got an offer to ink **Steve Ditko.** It was very nice of them to think of me, but I said, "I can't do it. Inking doesn't pay enough." And they said, "But it's **Steve Ditko!**" Like, all of a sudden, that would be an incentive for me to work for free.

ROBERT: *What's the regular page rate for non-superstar artists?*

KYLE: I don't know. The companies know they have to pay me, or I'll go do book covers. So I get a pretty good rate, even though I'm not a superstar.

ROBERT: *How did you get to paint the covers for THE FURTHER ADVENTURES OF BATMAN and THE FURTHER ADVENTURES OF THE JOKER?*

KYLE: I really didn't want to do those. A friend of mine, **Robert Simpson** — we went to school together — had gotten a job as an editor at Bantam. He used to work with me in the mailroom at Marvel

ROBERT: *That's a regular spawning ground of talent, isn't it?*

KYLE: Just that year. *(Laughter.)* The thing is, DC has it in their contract where they get to pick the cover artist in their licensed books. I thought that was ridiculous. Bantam has access to much better artists; they could get **Bob Peak** or **Mark English** if the price was right. **Robert Simpson** had to pick from DC's talent pool, and they kept trying to give him guys that weren't appropriate.

Finally the only guy they could agree on was me. I did it more as a favor, because I don't have much interest in Batman. *(Laughter.)*

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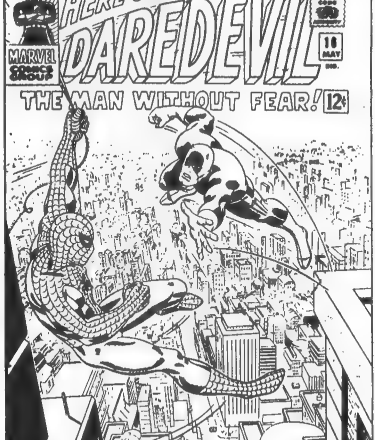
"Stan showed me AMAZING SPIDER-

JOHN ROMITA



Above: John's first Spidey illustration, before taking over the book. Next page: Self-portrait piece from the mid-'70s.

In this era of spider-mania and the multiple million-selling new SPIDER-MAN #1 by Todd McFarlane, Marvel Spider-Man editor Jim Salicrup sought out John Romita, Senior, who gave Spidey the slick look way back when, for the following candid conversation about the early years of the amazing arachnid . . .

JIM SALICRUP: *Let's start with a quick re-cap of the Romita origin story, OK?*

JOHN ROMITA: I was born in Brooklyn in 1930, prehistoric times, and went through the public school system and did all the things that a kid who could draw did. I drew all the necessary things for teachers in school, science projects, decorating the halls, backgrounds for the plays, stuff like that.

After junior high in Brooklyn I went to a high school in Manhattan that used to be called the High School of Industrial Arts, now it's called the School of Art and Design. And they had an experimental course which I think is still going on where they would teach high school kids a professional level of commercial art. The faculty is made up of commercial artists and they gave you a full foundation course — everything you needed in advertising. There wasn't a cartooning class when I was there, so I studied magazine illustration.

JIM: *Did you know you wanted to get into comics at that point?*

JOHN: I started out wanting to be a comic artist. I was a TERRY AND THE

All artwork accompanying this interview is TM. & ©1990 Marvel Entertainment Group Inc. All rights reserved.

MAN and I thought that it was terrible."

PIRATES freak and a FLASH GORDON follower and then a **Jack Kirby** follower. Then in high school, since there wasn't a comic-book class, I got interested in magazine and book illustration. First, I did line art book illustration, then I did full-color magazine illustration, and I thought that I was going to be a magazine illustrator. But about the time that I graduated, the magazines were falling off. So I started to get nervous and gravitated towards comics. Somebody

"I'd prepared myself for everything but drawing women."

Rare breakdown art from GIANT-SIZE AVENGERS #1 — 1974.

asked me to ghost-pencil a story. Even though I kept telling myself it was temporary, I never really had a lull in comic-book work. That was about 1949; I graduated in 1947 and did some advertising before I got into comics.

JIM: *Did you ever think you'd be an advertising artist?*

JOHN: I had two brushes with it. The first was before I got into comics. I liked it, but it looked like a real long shot. I would have had to do a long apprenticeship. I really did picture myself as an advertising artist — a commercial illustrator is what I wanted to be. But when I started doing comics I started to realize that I could get as much satisfaction and probably more steady money by doing comics. Later on, in the middle of my comics career, I went and took a job at BBD&O the advertising agency — to do storyboards. **Mort Meskin** was there, a few other comics artists had gravitated that way, and I thought that was what I wanted to do. I chickened out at the last second.

JIM: *What type of comics did you start drawing first?*

JOHN: The first story I did was a love story. And it was really very bad, because I had prepared myself for everything but drawing women. It came out so-so. I don't think it was ever printed.

The next job was for **Stan Lee,** I think for CRIME STORY. That was as a ghost — Stan didn't know I was doing it. I did about two or three CRIME STORIES and then I got drafted. I was in the Army for two years, but after six months, I was

"I did Gwen icy and cold as Ditko. Mary Jane I made fiery."

SAT. 2/26/77

1. SPI: Your blasters are useless! Your ARMOR can't beat me! Wanna call it a DAY, Doom?

2. MAN: Spider-Man BASTED the Latverian!
   OTHER: Then our plight is no longer HELPLESS!
   DOOM: WHAT? You side with HIM-- against Dr. DOOM?!!

3. DOOM: Then let us now END this charade!
   DOOM: I'll not sully my hands in battle-- for those of little faith!
   SPI: (THOT) It's OVER! I've WON!

the AMAZING SPIDER-MAN©

By Stan Lee and John Romita

YOUR BLASTERS ARE USELESS! YOUR ARMOR CAN'T BEAT ME! WANNA CALL IT A DAY, DOOM?
SPIDER-MAN BESTED THE LATVERIAN!
THEN OUR PLIGHT IS NO LONGER HELPLESS!
WHAT? YOU SIDE WITH HIM— AGAINST DR. DOOM?!!
THEN LET US NOW END THIS CHARADE!
I'LL NOT SULLY MY HANDS IN BATTLE— FOR THOSE OF LITTLE FAITH!
THEN IT'S OVER! I'VE WON!
STAN LEE JOHN ROMITH 2-26

From start to finish!: The syndicated Spidey newspaper strip, by Lee & Romita.

"Stan loved my stuff so much that he

assigned to Governor's Island in New York harbor. And I called up Stan, told him I had a Class A pass, meaning I could leave the post any time I wanted to leave. So I used to take the ferry and go uptown in uniform. When I told Stan I had some spare time on the weekends, he'd give me work.

My first story directly for Stan was a 3-page science-fiction story that I still have stats of.

JIM: *What did you think of Stan when you first met him?*

JOHN: He was very impressive. He was full of life, full of enthusiasm. Actually, with the first job for him, I didn't even meet him, his secretary came out and gave me the script; it was with the second or third job that I met him. And he immediately started to indoctrinate me. "This is nice, but . . ." He gave me pointers right from the beginning.

I was doing war stories, some historical war stories, westerns, romance, science fiction. I had no real preference. I wanted to draw people. I wished I didn't have to draw much machinery, tanks. The war stories defeated me because I had so much equipment to worry about. Then as I developed an ability to draw women, the romance stories were easier for me. But I always thought the westerns were the most fun.

JIM: *How did you teach yourself to draw women?*

JOHN: Well, I used to get a lot of

You could have caught this illustration in FANCAL '72, a calendar produced by Byron Preiss.

gave me a raise every time I went in."

reference from magazines, LIFE, SEVENTEEN, LADIES HOME JOURNAL.

JIM: *How long were the stories?*

JOHN: Five- to seven-page stories. Then, after I got out of the Army, Stan started trying to revive the super heroes. He brought out YOUNG MEN and another title. He had three stories in each of the books, one was of Captain America, one of Sub-Mariner, and the third was the Human Torch. He got **Bill Everett** to do the Sub-Mariner and **Carl Burgos** on the Human Torch. He didn't like the artist on the first Captain America story, so he asked me to re-do the splash page. And with the second issue of the series, I started doing Captain America. I did those stories for about a year. Then Stan decided to launch a CAPTAIN AMERICA series.

JIM: *Stan was writing all these stories?*

JOHN: Yes, Stan was writing all of them. They were all full scripts. I don't remember exactly how many issues of CAPTAIN AMERICA I did.

JIM: *Did Marvel have offices in the Empire State Building?*

JOHN: In 1949 they did. By the time I was out of the Army, they were at 270 Park Avenue in an apartment building. It was a very attractive place. Then they were at 655 Madison Avenue. And by that time things were going bad. They actually started going bad in comics in 1955. Some of the guys lost work. I hung on until about the beginning of 1958. Then Stan cut the production schedule down to just three or four books.

JIM: *So how did you survive?*

JOHN: Stan loved my stuff so much — I was getting better and better, he was giving me more and more pointers on storytelling — that he gave me a raise every time I went in. For about a year, every time I went in I would get a $2 raise. So I was up to about $40 a page, and then the congressional hearings kicked in and the industry started suffering. A lot of comic-book companies went under. Stan was ultimately reduced to a staff of just himself and a secretary. So I went over to DC. **Carmine Infantino** helped me get in, and I started doing romance stories for them. I worked for DC for eight years. I co-created a line of romance soap-opera characters. Then things started drying up for me at DC. That's when I called Stan.

JIM: *What was he doing at the time?*

JOHN: Stan would occasionally call me up when I was working for DC and ask me to come back. He was starting up mystery books and things were growing.

DC started to notice what Stan was doing. And around the time when FANTASTIC FOUR #1 came out I could hear the grumblings of the DC editors. Then we once had a meeting. They invited in all the freelancers and they had Stan's books — the covers — on the wall. And they had beside them the DC covers. And the editors were saying, "We don't know what's happening. **Stan Lee** is starting to sell a lot of books. The stuff looks like garbage, our stuff looks beautiful. We don't know what's causing this." There were all sorts of theories. They never knew what was going on. It never dawned on them that in the stories the characters were becoming human. And theirs weren't.

I was really dumb. I never noticed what was happening elsewhere. I didn't know about the FANTASTIC FOUR, SPIDER-MAN, none of that stuff. By the time 1965 came and I was finished up at DC and went over to see Stan, I had no idea about Spider-Man, or Iron Man, or Fantastic Four, or Avengers — I didn't know any of those. So Stan showed me all the stuff and gave me a quick rundown on what was happening. And he said, "You have no idea how popular these guys are." He showed me AMAZING SPIDER-MAN and said, "Would you believe that this is our second most popular book?" And I thought it was terrible, I didn't think it was anything to look at. But Stan told me that the readers were starting to care about these characters.

I told Stan that after eight years of pencilling romance comics, I was burned out, that I'd like to ink. So he gave me **Don Heck's** AVENGERS. I inked one story, and Stan loved it. Two days later, Stan calls me into the office and shows me some **Dick Ayers** DAREDEVIL pages. Dick was supposed to replace **Wally Wood,** who was leaving, but Stan said that Dick wasn't getting it right; it wasn't what he wanted. Stan wanted a little more grace, a little more glamor, so he asked me if I could do a one-page rough version of how I would draw a DAREDEVIL page that Dick done. It was one that had Ka-Zar and Zabu. I did a quick sketch, and Stan went crazy.

He loved it.

He said, "You've got to pencil this for me!" I told him that I'd rather ink, asked if he could get someone else to pencil it; he said there wasn't anyone else. Then he told me that he did not do his stories full script.

And *I* went crazy.

I told him I could never do it. But he got me to take the story. I did five pages. Stan loved the splash, but the next two pages were dull as piss. He told me that I was still thinking like a romance artist, that now I had to think a lot wilder, that I couldn't have a guy take an elevator down when he could leap out a window, that a guy couldn't pound mildly on a desk — he had to break the desk. He called up **Jack Kirby** and asked Jack to do some breakdowns for me. Jack said that he'd send in ten pages tomorrow and

"When I took over SPIDER-MAN, deep down, I

ten pages the next day.

And Jack did!

They were layouts — storytelling pacing. The bulk of it was very rough. But I could see what he wanted and how the story should be done. I finished up the pencils and inked them. That is how I did my first two DAREDEVIL stories. With the third story, I found that it was easier.

JIM: *Did Stan do any written plots?*

JOHN: No, it was all verbal. We would get together and talk for about an hour. Generally, it was after I had stayed up all night to finish a job. I would bring the story in, and then without my getting any sleep, he would start giving me the next story. If Stan weren't such a histrionic character, I would probably have fallen asleep right there, but he kept me awake because he was really jumping all over the office. He was using different voices, shouting, screaming, running down the hall — he really did all those crazy things.

I'd try to take notes and ask him to explain things that I was unclear about, but he never wrote anything down. The DAREDEVIL stories I did were all verbal; in fact, so was AMAZING SPIDER-MAN. Sometimes, it was a fifteen-minute verbal discussion starting like, "Let's use Doc Ock, let's put him in an exotic setting — a laboratory, a NASA space center . . . he breaks into a NASA space center and steals a rock sample from the moon, something like that . . ." He gave very sketchy stories. He'd usually have a good beginning and a good end, but never any real middle. Generally, I had to pace it myself.

JIM: *Did you read previous stories for research?*

JOHN: Yes, I read the nine or ten issues of DAREDEVIL that Stan gave me to bone up on that character. I read as many of the AMAZING SPIDER-MAN books as I could. He gave me about twenty-five of the first thirty-eight.

JIM: *What did you think of SPIDER-MAN?*

JOHN: Well, I felt that the series was drawn too crudely. I was getting slicker in my style when I was doing DARE-DEVIL, but I felt obliged, when I took over AMAZING SPIDER-MAN, to keep the **Ditko** feel. Deep down, I felt that **Ditko** was only temporarily off the book. Although I felt the art was crude, I did start to admire it around issue #29 or #30. **Steve Ditko** started getting real sharp — I really loved the sequence with the machinery in #31, #32, #33. I felt that was a sensational series. I think if Steve hadn't had philosophical clashes with Stan, he would have done excellent stuff.

Initially, I was very timid drawing the stories. So, for the first two or three years, I never felt completely comfortable drawing AMAZING SPIDER-MAN. And any part of me that came out in the drawing came out in spite of myself. I was trying to ghost it — draw as Steve would have drawn it. Then I started to show more and more of my own style.

JIM: *Did you pencil and ink many of your stories?*

JOHN: No, I was too slow. Also, Stan wanted me to do so many different things — covers, for instance. I was on and off as a penciller on AMAZING SPIDER-MAN. Then, when **Don Heck** and **Jim Mooney** were inking my stuff, that was when Stan had me doing more things in the office — correcting artwork. Stan would ask me to fix up the splash, fix a face. I would do work on THOR. Stan was finding fault with **Kirby**'s girls. Every time I did a beautiful girl in AMAZING SPIDER-MAN, he'd say I had to do the same sort of thing in THOR or whatever.

This took up a lot of time. So Stan would try to find ways to help me out with the stories, seeing if I could do just the breakdowns and then have someone else do the finished drawing.

When **Jim Mooney** took over, a lot of times I would do semi-finished pencils and **Mooney** would ink them; sometimes I would do breakdowns and **Mooney** would tighten them and finish them. For years when I was on AMAZING SPIDER-MAN I was the . . . oh, the ace in the hole. Stan would tell me the story, and if **Mooney** was going to draw a story

Famous death scene from AMAZING SPIDER-MAN #121, by Conway/Kane and Romita (w/Mortellaro, background inker).

"I'M BASICLY THE MOST VERSATILE."
WHO ELSE COULD SAVE A FALLING GIRL FROM CERTAIN DEAD—
GWEN?
HEY, KID—WHAT'S WRONG? DON'T YOU UNDERSTAND?
I SAVED YOU—
—YOU CAN'T BE—
NO! OH, NO, NO, NO—
DON'T BE DEAD, GWEN— I DON'T WANT YOU TO BE DEAD!

felt Ditko was only temporarily off the book."

— because, for instance, I was pencilling a CAPTAIN AMERICA story — I'd embellish the instructions that Stan had given me, in effect co-plotting the story.

Then, when **John Buscema** did breakdowns, he was the fastest guy, Stan said, "Let's get ahead on AMAZING SPIDER-MAN, let's get **John Buscema** to draw it." So Stan would give me a general outline — he would choose a character, a setting, and give an outline and I would plot it with **Buscema.** And I'd have to listen to John's growling. "Oh I hate this Spider-Man. This is a lot of shit!" Oh, he hated super heroes — especially Spider-Man. "All these characters! How do you keep them straight? Who's Aunt May? Which one is the redhead?" But he knew how to draw beautiful women.

Then I went through a period with **Gil Kane.** With Gil, Stan wanted me to ink it because Gil had such a different style; he wanted me to ink it, to keep the look consistent.

So on AMAZING SPIDER-MAN, I was doing lots of things — sometimes, I was acting as the quality control. Stan would give it to **Buscema** as a breakdown, then to **Mooney** to ink, but in between I had to make adjustments. I would fix the faces or change a panel or two, tighten up the pages.

JIM: *How did you come up with Mary Jane?*

JOHN: Well, you know that Stan had Mary Jane in the wings in AMAZING SPIDER-MAN for about six months. We'd see the back view of her, Anna Watson would mention her. Stan was building her up. And when I took over the art, Stan said, "One of the good things about you taking over is that now I can bring Mary Jane into the story." And I asked Stan what he meant, and he told me that he didn't like the way **Ditko** was doing Mary Jane. The go-go dancers were hot then. Stan wanted Mary Jane to be a wild, real flashy, stream-lined girl. Someone who was really today.

So I did some sketches after the second issue I drew. I used the actress **Ann-Margaret** as a guide. I added dimples and a cleft in the chin so that she'd look that much more different from Peter's girlfriend at the time, Gwen Stacy. When I did Gwen, I did her as icy and cold and aloof as **Ditko** did; and when Mary Jane came in I made her as fiery as we could. I did a color sketch, suggesting the red hair. I don't think her hair was red in the previous books. And I wanted her to have green eyes. I still have the original color sketch. So we built Mary Jane's appearance up in the whole story where we see her for the first time. And we got her in on the last panel. And I did the sexiest shot I could. I wish I had a chance to do it over. People thought it was good, they still remember it. But I wanted it to be something that would really knock people's socks off.

JIM: *How did the Kingpin come about?*

JOHN: Stan would come in and sometimes just pin a piece of paper with a name on it on my drawing board when I was out. This one was "Kingpin of crime — master criminal." When Stan did this, I'd do up some sketches and bring them in and ask him what he thought. In the Kingpin's case . . . I used some cinematic tricks by way of **Milton Caniff,** some of those things. I started showing the Kingpin silhouetted against a Manhattan skyline, looking out of his penthouse window. Then I'd show a back view, a close-up of his hand. I made him four hundred pounds, and I made him bald. I

Sword & sorcery of a feminine kind, by Romita.

"I had the satisfaction of seeing SPIDER-MAN go

was thinking of an actor named **Robert Middleton** — I don't know if he ever appeared bald on the screen, but I was thinking of someone as frightening as that — who used to play some really frightening characters. So I thought of him and I used his general features for the Kingpin.

When I did the Kingpin I was thinking of ultra-powerful and ultra-rich. So I immediately put a wing-collar, a stick pin in his tie, and a vest. A fancy expensive ring . . . I did the standard cartoon rich-man version. But I made him extra strong. Now, I, don't know if Stan told me to make him strong; I think what happened when he and I were working on the plot, Stan suggested that Kingpin be working out and that a couple of thugs would come in and he'd clobber them.

And then I'd exaggerate that. And Stan would play off that. This interplay worked great. Stan might have thought to a certain level Kingpin would be a strong man, surprisingly strong. Then I would make him extra muscular, and the guys Kingpin would fight would be stronger. And Kingpin would throw them through the wall. And Stan would embellish the conversation further. And Stan would be ironic, "Next time send me guys who can fight better, ones from Chicago. I didn't even work up a sweat." So it was a great combination, the way we worked. A lot of times I would do little plot twists that he would pick up on. Other times he would forget.

JIM: *Did you develop a special feeling for doing Spider-Man?*

JOHN: It was always hard work. I didn't figure to stay on it. As years went on, it was getting harder and harder. It was a big character. And I had the satisfaction of seeing AMAZING SPIDER-MAN go from being our #2 book to being #1. I'm proud of that. The same thing with romance books; I hated romance books. But the challenge — I did them for eight years because I was going to make them better than I would've if I had liked them.

JIM: *What was the top book back then?*

JOHN: It was FANTASTIC FOUR. It was the flagship book. And AMAZING

The newspaper strip . . . false start #1 — as mentioned.

SPIDER-MAN
I'M SORRY OUR FIRST MEETING IS SO SHORT, LIVED, SPIDER-MAN!
BUT UN-FORTUNATELY, THERE'S NO PLACE FOR YOU IN MY SCHEME OF THINGS!
EVEN YOUR GREAT POWER WAS NO MATCH FOR MY OWN!
MAYBE MY POWER DOESN'T IMPRESS HIM...
...BUT LET'S SEE WHAT MY WEBBING CAN DO!
THWIP!
STAN LEE JOHN ROMITA
SPIDER-MAN
MY WEBBING SAVED ME FROM BECOMING AN INKSPOT ON THE GROUND BELOW!
BUT THE MOMENTUM IS TOO GREAT!
...I'M GONNA HIT THE WALL!
CAN'T TWIST AROUND IN TIME!
UNNHHH!
MY BACK!
IT...FEELS LIKE...I BROKE IT!
THIS IS ONE FIGHT...THAT SPIDER-MAN WON'T...WALK AWAY FROM!
I'M HELPLESS...I CAN'T EVEN MOVE!
WHAT A WAY...FOR SPIDEY...TO MAKE HIS FINAL EXIT!

from being our #2 book to being #1. I'm proud of that."

SPIDER-MAN was second. And then the Hulk was coming up. I had picked up the sales of DAREDEVIL, which made me proud; I always regretted the fact that I never had the chance to ride DAREDEVIL up further. I was enjoying DAREDEVIL — it was really up my alley.

JIM: *Did you like the Spider-Man characters?*

JOHN: Oh yeah, especially when I started introducing characters. For instance, Gwen's father, Captain Stacy. I don't think he would have lasted that long in the book if I hadn't cared that much for him; I put so much personality into him that Stan couldn't help it. A lot of times I would put so much personality into secondary characters that Stan would make them major characters.

JIM: *When did Robbie Robertson appear? Was that Ditko or you?*

JOHN: That was me. Robertson . . . I was thinking of an ex-fighter who became a newspaperman. I gave him a broken nose and in one sketch he had a cauliflower ear.

JIM: *I wish we knew this.*

JOHN: Sue I used to write those notes. I said he was an ex-fighter.

JIM: *I don't think Stan ever used that.*

JOHN: No, I don't think he ever did. In fact, I called him Robbie Robertson, thinking that his first name would be Robert. And Stan called him Joe Robertson. And the first time I heard that, it really threw me. I don't know where he got that. But yeah, Stacy, Robertson — Betty Brant I was saddled with, but I tried to make her more, more of a human being. She was good with **Ditko.**

The biggest problem I had with AMAZING SPIDER-MAN was that I was making Peter Parker too self-sufficient. I couldn't help myself; when I do a hero, I try to make him as good looking as I can. The way I saw the character was not a skinny, narrow-shouldered kid with hives. I just thought of him differently. And Stan hounded me on that. I tried to make him thinner, but Peter never stayed that way.

JIM: *Did you prefer the pencilling to inking other artists?*

JOHN: Well, only because it was so hard coming up with the stories, I didn't prefer the pencils; but when I was inking, I would always suffer anyway. I would always prefer to pencil and ink my own stuff, but I never had time to do that. So the next thing was to do tight pencils and hope the inker would not change things.

JIM: *How did you work out the covers? I think you did some of the best covers — especially when they introduced new characters.*

JOHN: I would make sketches and Stan would critique them. The ones I enjoyed were the trick covers — you know, the big close-up of Doc Ock with reflections in his eyeglasses. Spider-Man's costume pinned to the wall.

Stan made the covers very important. His attitude was that if the comic doesn't have a good cover, nobody is going to notice it. We have to give it a dynamite cover. I always felt that was my obligation. When I did a cover sketch, I felt I had to make it a knock-out cover sketch. Problem is, you couldn't do a knock-out cover every time. Sometimes, we had to do a storytelling cover, but I enjoyed the startling ones. Like #50, "Spider-Man No More."

JIM: *What about Jameson and the lighter moments?*

JOHN: I liked that. I thought that **Ditko** made him a very serious, angry guy. I started to animate Jameson a little more, and Stan started to write him a little lighter — not comical, but a little bit light-opera type.

JIM: *About the time you started drawing AMAZING SPIDER-MAN there was a Saturday morning cartoon show. Did that have any effect on you? Did they consult with you?*

JOHN: We were supplying them with key drawings. And they would use some of our panels for key drawings. They used some of the storylines from the books, doing a sort of short-hand version. All it meant was more work, because we had to supply them with so much stuff.

JIM: *There were some samples of a Spider-Man comic strip that featured the Prowler around that time.*

JOHN: Yeah, we did a sample. And unfortunately it never got promoted. That was 1972-73, then in 1976 a syndicate asked us to start a Spider-Man strip. We talked about how to do it, and when they suggested that it be a Sunday strip, I told them that I'd love to do it — So I did the first Sunday's strip, they loved it. The syndicate then said that it was too good, we've also got to go daily, so what happened was I had to chop up the Sunday strip and turn it into six dailies.

Stan didn't give me a script. We had talked about what we had to do. I just drew it as an introduction to the characters And he wrote it.

In one story we did, Stan wanted to do something about terrorists. I suggested Doctor Doom. Doctor Doom would go to the United Nations and tell everyone that he had the solution to end all the terrorism. Of course, what he didn't tell them was that he was the head terrorist. So, if he wanted to knock out any terrorist, he could actually do it. We had a lot of third world countries jumping on the bandwagon, saying, "Yeah, he can deliver — there's no crime in Latveria." We cashed in on a SPIDEY SUPER STORIES plot which was based on a story from the FANTASTIC FOUR. We did this because we were so pressed for time. I did four years on the strip before I finally had to stop doing it.

JIM: *Have you ever had the urge to write, draw, and ink?*

JOHN: Only fleetingly.

Stan Lee & John Romita
IT'S STICKING! IT BROKE MY FALL!
BUT I'M SWINGING TOO FAST!
...GONNA SLAM INTO THE WALL!
Stan Lee & John Romita
AFTER ALL THE BATTLES... ALL THE TRIUMPHS... I NEVER DREAMT... IT WOULD END... LIKE THIS!
I NEVER THOUGHT... I'D SOMEDAY WONDER... WAS IT ALL... REALLY WORTH IT?
STAN LEE & JOHN ROMITA
NEXT: HOW IT BEGAN

"It was scary because I was there on a phony deal."

HAROLD MICHAELSON

From his early studio work for such notables as Hutchcock and De Mille, beyond the studio era on such films as THE BIRDS (1963), THE GRADUATE (1967), FIDDLER ON THE ROOF (1971), and beyond even into his "retirement" years on such films as TERMS OF ENDEARMENT (1983), COTTON CLUB (1984), WHITE NIGHTS (1985), RUNNING SCARED (1986), Harold Michaelson has earned his reputation as one of Hollywood's top sketch artists/illustrators/art directors. He has also led personal battles for his own, and subsequently everyone else's, creative freedom and artistic integrity — for example, in the area of keeping possession of his original artwork. And to this day he continues to give back to his chosen profession by teaching and by preserving what he can of its past. "When we retire, us old guys," he says, "we stay out a certain amount of time and then we can come back." And comics fans should take note because — together with Zuberano, whose credits include a landmark film by the name of CITIZEN KANE (1941) — Harold Michaelson has most recently employed his talents to help bring some of Chester Gould's characters to the silver screen . . .

PAUL POWER: *Harold, why did you get into the film business in the first place? And when, what year?*

HAROLD MICHAELSON: In 1949. When I got out the Army, WW2, I went to art school in New York and took illustration because illustration was in its heyday in magazines and I admired all of those guys. As an ex-GI we were invited to the Illustrators Society in New York. And they had *marvelous* exhibits, and it was just a wonderful group. Just to *be* with these guys was the greatest thing in the world, you know. But I just couldn't get a job, you just couldn't do it, so when I came out to California — we got married out here — and I got a job as a salesman in an art supplies store.

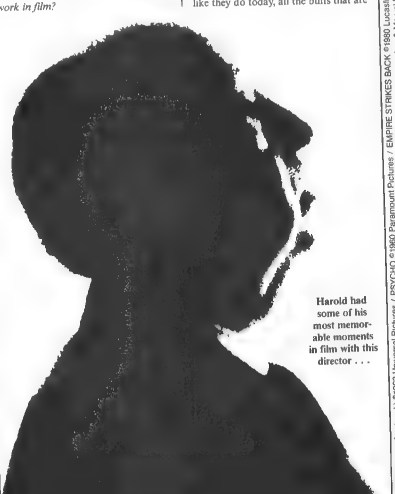
I went to the different studios to put my name in and everything like that, and then one day I get a call from Columbia saying, "Were you the fellow that did the drawings for us?" I said yes even though I wasn't. What have you got to lose? *(Laughter.)* "Can you come to work Monday as an apprentice?" So I went to work as an apprentice. It was *scary* because I was in there on a phony deal, you know, I didn't know how to project or anything like that, and so I picked it up and just hung on.

PAUL: *It was always your intention to work in film?*

HAROLD: No, I didn't even know there were any artists in film. You see, there are *buffs* today — today film is an "artform" and everybody knows what's there. But film was something we went to on a Saturday. It was great and everything, but I never thought in terms of actually being *involved* with it.

PAUL: *You were not really aware of it?*

HAROLD: No, none of us were. You went to the movies and you saw a movie, nobody was saying so-and-so drew this like they do today, all the buffs that are



Harold had some of his most memorable moments in film with this director . . .

THE BIRDS (photos & artwork) ©1963 Universal Pictures / PSYCHO © 1960 Paramount Pictures / EMPIRE STRIKES BACK ©1980 Lucasfilm, Ltd. / THE INCREDIBLE SHRINKING MAN © 1957 [illegible] / GRADUATE (photo & artwork) ©1967 Lawrence Turman, Inc. / FIDDLER ON THE ROOF © 1971 Mirisch-Cartier Productions / Photos courtesy of Ed Landau / Artwork © 1985 Lorimar-Telepictures Enterprises, Inc. & Marvel Entertainment Group, Inc

"As an illustrator, certain scenes have to be visualized."

really into it. You went and you saw the movie. You saw ships at sea and tremendous storms, and you never thought where the camera was. They had all these wonderful tanks, all these wonderful hydraulic things that you could work with. But now you can't do that. They talk about realism, but you go out there and try to shoot those things that way and you're going to drown! *(Laughter.)* But they threw all that stuff out. When that movie with the motorcycles came out . .

PAUL: *EASY RIDER?*

HAROLD: Yeah. When that came out they threw everything away and bought motorcycles. *(Laughter.)* Fantastic lack of imagination. You should be able to take any book or any script and if it's really good — because that's the basis of the whole thing — if it's really good we can make it. But now we cannot make it because we do not have the equipment and it's too expensive and the whole damn thing.

BEA JAMES: *Do you remember the first film you worked on?*

HAROLD: Oh, no. Actually, see, in the art department at that time you didn't work on *a* film. You were in the art department and one art director would bring you a plan and you would project it, and then another art director would bring you a plan and you would project it and make a sketch. But you never saw a script, you really didn't know what you were doing. So, I was with Columbia for a couple of years. Let's see, I worked on **Rita Hayworth** films, and what was that one . . . FROM HERE TO ETERNITY —

PAUL: *Wow.*

HAROLD: There, you see — I didn't do that. *(Laughter.)* And then it was slow over there and Paramount was looking for somebody because they were going to do THE TEN COMMANDMENTS — they had already started working on it and had about four sketch artists on it — and I came over there as a junior. And I just hung on, you know.

PAUL: *Did you get to work with De Mille at all?*

HAROLD: With him *personally,* no no no. The man was a legend. You would look out the window and see him coming by with his entourage. But he did see the sketches. We did *thousands.* **Bill Majors** and I did most of the storyboard continuity, and in fact when they went to Egypt they *mounted* them, it was like a comic strip. He didn't mess around. But we did not have contact with him.

PAUL: *What do you feel is your true function in film as an illustrator and as an art director?*

HAROLD: Well, as an illustrator, there are certain scenes that *have* to be visualized, like a 747 coming in for a landing and crashing. How are we going to do it? You can dig a trench and let one wheel go into the trench and spin it around, have one wing prepared to shear off, set it up to hit a phony building. It's all worked out along the visual, it is not just a dreamt up thing. It's, if the guy

Mr. Michaelson's storyboards as compared to the film's stills.

#75- GROUP AT WINDOW
#76- GULL HITS AFTER
#79- CLOSE SHOT - GASOLINE
#81- PAN BACK TO STATION
#82- TRUCK TURNS BACK TO THE PARK
#83- MAN LOOKING REAR - MELANIE'S V.P.
LUBRICATION
TIRES BATTERIES

"When I worked on THE GRADUATE Dick

likes it, can it be done; yes, it can be done.

And something like an escape. In a picture called WHITE NIGHTS they were shooting in Helsinki, they had this apartment house they were going to escape from. So you have photographs of it and the director tells you what he would like to see, and you see if it's feasible. After all, they're up there six stories above the ground — you're not going to have your *stars* up six stories — *(Laughter.)* So you start out with stunt men and everything and then you have to go on the stage and do certain things — well, it had just better be planned out. It just cannot be *done* any other way.

PAUL: *Would you rather work with the director or the production designer?*

HAROLD: It isn't a matter of preference, everything is different. When I worked on THE GRADUATE I would talk to **Dick Sylbert** and sort of gather some of the conceptions he had in mind. He had certain overall conceptions of the film being *wet*, you know. So there were sprinklers on at times, and there was a thing in the pool, and this that and the other thing. I would discuss things with Dick and then I would just forge ahead, and that evening I would go up to **Mike Nichols** and put it on his desk, the copies of it, and I would go home. The next day I would start on another thing and keep putting it on his desk. Now, I just *assumed* he took them home and looked at them in his free time, and some I feel that we used. Some I wouldn't use the word *rejected* actually, but some maybe sparked him on to do something *else*. It was a *stimulating* thing. And even if you reject a setup from the sketch you have saved yourself a lot of money, as opposed to setting up with all the lights and deciding this is not the shot.

BEA: *I was thinking about that film this morning, as a matter of fact, and I thought that was real tight.*

PAUL: *Yeah, oh yeah.*

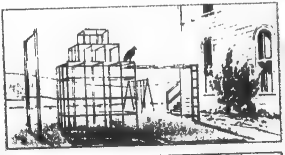
HAROLD: Well, in the old days MGM had *twelve* illustrators — or sketch artists, as they call them now — and a few of them just *specialized* in storyboard. You go back to **Orson Welles** who came out here to do his first picture, and by God he had storyboard by **Zuberano** and he *went* by it. And I did these things for **Hitchcock** — and that doesn't take anything away from **Hitchcock**, somehow or another people remember his name before mine. It's kind of amazing, you know.

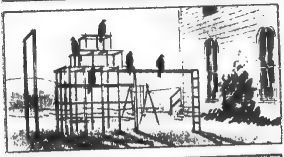
PAUL: *Have you ever made story concept changes by your storyboards or illustrations in a film?*

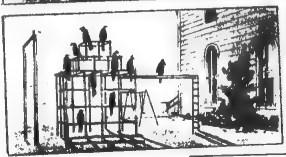
HAROLD: Well, when you say "concept," that's the thing that we're really playing around with, you know. There are times when you're *asked* to do a certain thing, like an escape or a chase or something like that, where *you* will introduce certain things that may not have been written but you feel that are good for this thing in order to cut to something else. Or, you find yourself in a position, because this visual is right in front of you, where you say, "What do I do now, how do I cut inside?" In other words, it's not just like a continuous thing. It's a form of moviemaking, I don't know what you would call it.

PAUL: *Functional planning?*

Here and next two pages: More boards from Hitchcock's THE BIRDS.







Sylbert had conceptions of the film being wet."

HAROLD: Well, that sounds good. *(Laughter.)*

PAUL: *Have you ever had blanket denial of your contribution to a film by a director?*

HAROLD: Well, I couldn't tell you *exactly* where, but it has been done. I'm not going to mention names, but one guy says he *never* uses sketches and I know the guy who's been sketching for him for years. In my case, I don't know specifically if somebody said it. But in this one case there was an interview — and we *laughed*, we really laughed. He says, "No way, there's absolutely no use." *(Laughter.)* It's incredible! **Hitchcock** used storyboards, this did not ruffle him at all — he used to do a storyboard, himself.

BEA: *In your mind he was a genius?*

HAROLD: Well, genius is a funny word. He had — as far as I'm concerned — the most influence on me, in my thinking. Subjective and objective ways of looking at things, the things that he went for to build up suspense, how you should see a picture — jump to God's point of view and then jump down. The things I learned from him and from **Bob Boyle,** who did that picture with Mount Rushmore —

PAUL: *NORTH BY NORTHWEST.*

HAROLD: Yeah, he'd been with him a long time — in fact, even *before* that on FOREIGN CORRESPONDENT. So you start getting a smattering of how he thinks and everything like that, and then all of a sudden one day you realize he thinks right. There are so many ways of building up and going towards something, something that's very dangerous, and some directors jump into *where* it is dangerous and shoot back, which gives away something, whereas he keeps coming closer and closer to the danger. Or if he would leap forward there would be a movement in the thing which would scare the hell out of you, and jump back! You know what I mean?

The man *used* film, bits and pieces of film, like an artist uses paint out of a palette. And there are very few who think like this. I don't know what their thinking processes are, because a lot of them think the acting and the staging and the dialogue and all of that — which is *vitally* important — but looking through the camera viewpoint, it's association or it's relationship to the audience, was **Hitchcock's** thing. He knew how to take an audience and twist 'em and turn 'em.

PAUL: *He turned you into a voyeur. For that amount of time that you were at his movies, you weren't sitting in a seat, you were* there

HAROLD: Oh, absolutely, he would do this. And little by little I would feel these things and as I got to know his way I would draw along those lines. And that was *so* valuable to me that to me he is the greatest. But, you see, there are different kinds of movies; there's **George Kukor,** brilliant with the dialogue and the actors and getting subtleties and all that kind of stuff. But my thinking of a movie, movies that I like to work on, as **Hitchcock's:** a series of still pictures put together to create an idea in the audience's mind. Just a series of pictures. You see this, you see this, you see this, and you now know the whole goddamn story and nobody said a word. That is like the essence, you know. All the other stuff — believe me, I'm not taking away from anything else — but the absolute essence is if you can

On THE BIRDS: "Here's another case of working with a

get this idea across.

PAUL: *How do you feel about screen credit for illustrators, and do they deserve it?*

HAROLD: When you say "they," let's not use it as a group. Of course *individually* they deserve it, and they are given this in many cases. I get it a lot of times. To me there's no question about it. To bring it up as kind of a union thing is another ball game completely. If you have helped in this area, there's no question that you deserve it. Of course, we're dealing with the contracts and all the other stuff where they wheel and deal, which is completely out of my thing. I think I deserve it, okay. If you think you deserve it, and he thinks he deserves it, *that's* what counts. And if you don't get it you can get mad.

PAUL: *What were the films that you worked on for Hitch? REAR WINDOW?*

HAROLD: No. I'm not sure, it may have been **Bill Majors** because he was there at the time. When **Hitchcock** was at Paramount I worked on some of them, but it was very funny because I didn't have that relationship at all that I had on THE BIRDS. At Paramount you worked in the art department, you didn't get *out* of the art department, so the stuff was *fed* to **Hitchcock.**

PAUL: *What year was this?*

HAROLD: Oh, my God . . . . The only thing I remember was when the first Sputnik flew over we stood out in the back and *looked* at the thing, that's when I was at Paramount. That was a *shock*, you know. It was really a shocker.

But the pictures . . . what the hell was the one with **James Stewart** that had something — or was it **Cary Grant**? — they went to Africa and then they go back to England and he's on a steeple or something, a church steeple in England. I had to lay out — they took some shots in England from the church steeple and they made some process — I had to *back* project that thing, back up the thing, and have them build the steeple at an angle. I'm pretty good at this perspective stuff, it's a *fun* thing, like doing a crossword puzzle. *(Laughter.)* I forget what picture it was, I think it was with **Doris Day.** What are the names of these? They go down to the wine cellar and the kid is a captive upstairs or something. I worked on a few of them there ——

PAUL: *It wasn't VERTIGO?*

HAROLD: No, no, I *left* when they started to make VERTIGO. But as I say, **Bill Majors** made these *remarkable* sketches for it, and then whoever was available would make it for it, you see what I mean. They kept us apart.

BEA: *Same old same old.*

HAROLD: Which is not good, communication makes a better movie.

BEA: *You worked on THE BIRDS?*

HAROLD: Well, THE BIRDS was a thing where **Bob Boyle** was the production designer, so here's another case of working with a production designer who was absolutely the greatest guy in the world.

PAUL: *He was an illustrator as well, wasn't he?*

HAROLD: He did — for crying out loud, that's part of our *thing*. I started doing storyboard for him, and then they all went up to Bodega Bay and I started doing a sequence — *nobody* was down here — a sequence of her in the phone

designer who was absolutely the greatest in the world."

booth or something like that, and I sent it up there. That's when *Hitch* said, "Bring this guy up here." So then I went up there and I was with Bob, going out and scouting locations and doing things and everything like that, really *working!* You see, with a group like this there's no telling *what* you can do. You can go absolutely crazy! There's almost no jurisdiction, you now what I mean. You're just *creating!* And with somebody like **Boyle** it is this unbelievable pleasure.

PAUL: *Yeah I've found that. How would you work with Hitchcock?*

HAROLD: Well, actually, I worked mostly with **Boyle.** It took a long time to get near **Hitchcock** because **Hitchcock** was a legend and I was in tremendous awe of him. I had worked at Paramount in the art department for a long time, he had done REAR WINDOW and every goddamn thing, *marvelous* things, so when I got on THE BIRDS I felt that I was working *for* him — I didn't feel that I was working for him on the others. And with Bob, who *knew* him, was *close* to him, and of course **Al Whitlock** who knew him from way back —

PAUL: *From London days.*

HAROLD: We worked as a group and I think a lot of the things worked out so well because the group was such a great group. There was a mutual respect, you know. There was no *ego* problem. Bob doesn't have it and neither does Albert, and they're terrific — which allows you to *do* things because you're not stepping on anybody.

PAUL: *Yeah, I find I'm cautious about that. I'm friendly, I'm myself, but I'm thinking, "Oh, shit, whose toes am I possibly going to step on in order to do my best job?"*

HAROLD: That is really the basis of one of the most awkward things about the whole job. I gave a seminar *with* **Bob Boyle,** we both gave it, and we were discussing certain things. I was showing a storyboard, and one of the students got up and said, "How *dare* you tell us directors what to do!"

PAUL: *He said that?*

HAROLD: Yeah, and I said, "Well, I don't know, **Hitchcock** didn't seem to mind." *(Laughter.)* But, you see, this *attitude* has been given to them by this newly found artform, the movies — which were *always* the movies, you know. But now you're an *auteur* — that's a word I learned — and you do everything yourself, and you're brilliant and you're a genius and everything. Except you don't know *half* the stuff that's going on.

Like these kids who go, "How *dare* you!" "What do you mean how dare I — who the hell are you to open your big mouth, you little shit." *(Laughter.)* He must be working for a drug store today, you know. "Don't give me this crap. I've been in it a long time, I know an awful lot, this guy sitting next to me knows an awful lot, that guy over there knows an awful lot, and altogether we may really help a movie. So don't give me this how dare you crap."

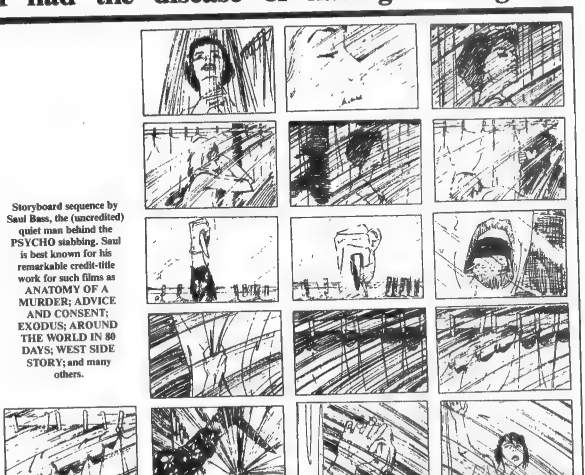
BEA: *I think that's the whole pusillanimous thing about this business right now and why these movies have got so small-minded and petty, because they're saying they're more important than the movies.*

PAUL: *I feel a lot of the new cats don't really know timing, they don't really know acting.*

HAROLD: You have nothing but sensation from beginning to end. **Hitchcock** would build up to a certain point and then all of a sudden you were on Mount Rushmore or the Statue of Liberty or

Preliminary sketches by Robert Boyle.

"I had the disease of having nothing but



Storyboard sequence by Saul Bass, the (uncredited) quiet man behind the PSYCHO stabbing. Saul is best known for his remarkable credit-title work for such films as ANATOMY OF A MURDER; ADVICE AND CONSENT; EXODUS; AROUND THE WORLD IN 80 DAYS; WEST SIDE STORY; and many others.

some grand scale thing. A lot of pictures start out now in a fantastic scale and never seem to get off. Some people who do pictures — we won't mention names — really think they're **Hitchcock**, and I resent the hell out of that. They have no idea — no idea in the world.

Hold it, fellows. I'll tell you one experience I had with him. I did a sequence and I went in with Bob to show him the sequence, and I was so proud of it, I was really shining, and he looked at it and he said, "This is really great, it is really wonderful, but I can't use it here." And I thought, "Why you fat senile —" *(Laughter.)* But the funny thing is, I found out, the man was so right and I was so wrong. What I had was the disease that a lot of people have of having nothing but sensational stuff throughout the whole goddamn show, and by God it was wrong.

A symphony — and I know nothing about music — but a symphony builds up and you get certain low points and high points and you get a climax and all this other stuff. Well, a movie is the same damn thing. If you start out with sensation, where do you go from there? He had this unbelievable sense, and I've admired him for it ever since. This is moviemaking and no bullshit. That's moviemaking and he had it. And the funny thing about **Hitchcock** — Albert was very close to him, would have him in for tea or wine every day, and they would have fish flown out from England because they were Limeys, you know — and they would sit and talk and come up with things. There was one picture that he did, a later picture that he did at Universal, with a detective whose wife was going to gourmet cooking school —

PAUL: *Oh, FRENZY!*

HAROLD: FRENZY, was that it?

PAUL: *FRENZY, yeah yeah yeah!*

HAROLD: I had nothing to do with this picture at all except to sit in absolute awe and wonder. I don't know whether it made money or anything, but he liked ham and eggs, and she makes this thing, and while he's talking with her the fork is hitting the crab apple and it's going around the plate — as he's explaining the murder! That's **Hitchcock.** That is the man who will take the script and will figure out these things. It knocked me out, it was *brilliant!*

PAUL: *I try to put those little things in my storyboards because they're very real.*

HAROLD: That's part of the thing, you *hope* you can come up with something, you just *hope* you can come up with something. And you're also hoping you don't step on anybody's toes at the same time. Your thinking processes are along those lines, they're not diagrammatical. Your thinking processes are this, and your *advantage* is that you can put it down on paper. And it can be torn up and thrown away, you know. But that is our big advantage, and that is the fun!

PAUL: *Before any real money is spent you can figure it out.*

HAROLD: You come up with an *idea*, it didn't cost a damn thing. These are the wonderful things that you can do. And he *had* it, as I say — and I can't go too

sensational stuff throughout the whole show."

high in my praise. He would come up with these things and I would say, "My God, I wish I had thought of that. I *wish* I had thought of that." So you try to think along his lines. There are great directors around, but I don't know anybody who has the soul or whatever you call it to be *inside* the negative, inside the actual film to touch it and taste it and feel it, that he had.

I was in the screening room with him one day and he was showing all these different shots that he had shot, different shots of her being pecked by the birds — I drew a whole bunch of stuff and then they shot a whole bunch of stuff. I sat in the screening room with him and **Tomasini,** who was his editor, and he would look at it and say, "Twelve frames. Three feet. Two frames." I couldn't believe this and I was there. And these little fast cuts and everything created a tremendous *terror* in the thing, based on still pictures put together to create an idea. The one in the bathtub —

PAUL: *PSYCHO.*

HAROLD: Yeah.

PAUL: *Did you do that?*

HAROLD: No, **Joe Herley.** You thought you saw much more than you ever saw, and that's what the hell it's all about.

PAUL: *That truly terrorized me. I first saw that on TV when I was eight years old.*

HAROLD: Eight years old. *(Laughter.)* I was 50.

PAUL: *How would you like illustrators to be seen and perceived by the general movie public. And how do you think they've perceived us so far?*

HAROLD: I don't think they perceive us at all. Because our industry . . . I don't even think of it in terms as an industry. Almost anybody can come into it. Some kid out of high school can hit with a little picture or something and become really big, so there is no *precedent* for anything. A lot of the people that come into the industry are *shocked!* They know very little about what it's possible to do. We did all these special effects way back when without computers. Special effects, nobody *cares* how they're done, it's just what comes on the screen. If you can *frighten* a person, or *awe* a person, or do anything with them, you've succeeded.

Albert Whitlock, when he does his, he does unbelievable stuff. He'll do a thing that he calls a "mechano set," which is an erector set with all these little pulleys and things, and all of a sudden you've got water and the moon shining, clouds moving and everything like that. There's no computer, just this lousy little thing, but he has done it, and yet the people do not know and they accept it. They don't know that everybody behind the scenes has been working to create this effect. And Albert is brilliant. Did I answer your question?

PAUL: *Yeah, but how would you like the general movie public to perceive illustrators, or do you think it matters?*

HAROLD: Well, for the general movie public I *personally* feel . . . you're almost not noticed in what you do. But anybody in the business itself should know; it should be known and accepted as part of the business. It should not come as a big *surprise* to some people. Some people are shocked: "My God, you do *this?*"

I know one guy, what they call a filmmaker, doing documentaries — and damn good documentary films — through mutual friends I met him and he came up to see what we were doing, and he was *shocked* to see the stuff we were doing. His girlfriend was also a film-maker — I hate to use that term — *(Laughter.)* But he says, "Wouldn't this be great if we had this available to us?"

What the director has to do, 100 different things, and all these things are *vital.* If there's somebody to help him along, even if he rejects 100% of it, you save yourself time, trouble and money. This is such a logical way to do pictures to me that I can't comprehend any other way. I can't comprehend coming down on a stage with 100 people around, *well paid,* and telling them, "I think this is a good idea, I'd like to shoot over there."

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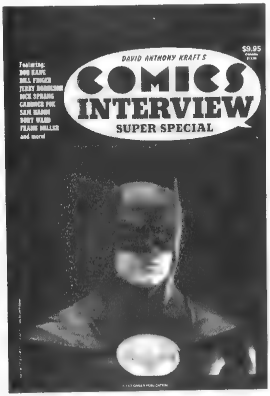

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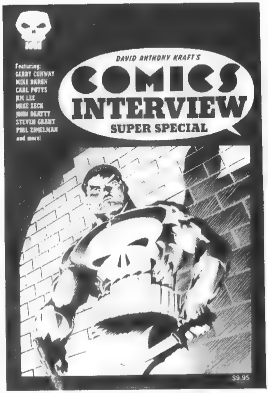

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"The movie business was never really extravagant."

Then you go to your office and for the next two hours the cameraman is setting up all the lights and everything, and then you come out and say, "I don't know, I don't think that's what I want." If they did that in the old days they would have been shot! And can you imagine having to *explain* that to people! You know and they don't know, which means something's wrong with the business.

BEA: *Right, right. I always look at that as sort of a management sort of thing. Any good manager when they're running a play should be able to leave because everything else is being run so well and they don't need to be there.*

HAROLD: That's it. But they should also, I feel, *know* what the hell is going on.

BEA: *Yes, of course.*

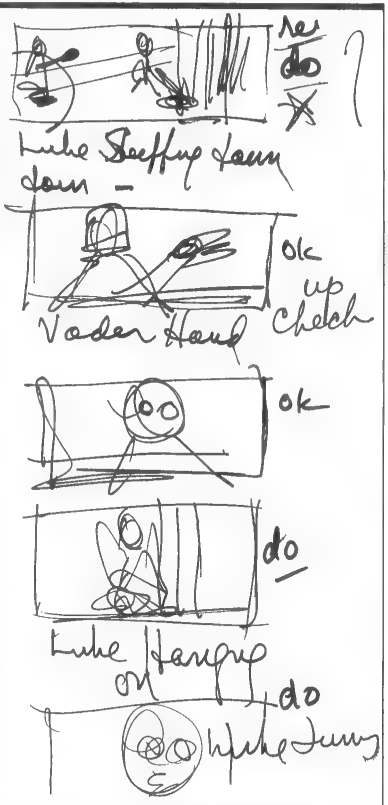
HAROLD: And the funny thing about the movie business is the movie business was never really extravagant — all the departments were there for a reason. You went down to the stock department, or you called, and you said you needed a fireplace, they would send you up cards with the fireplaces they had not only drawn in scale but also photographed, and it would even say what condition it was in right now. You wanted this fireplace and you slid it under your tracing, traced it right on down. And it had a number, so you called them and said have this number on the set, and there it was.

PAUL: *Truly efficient.*

HAROLD: Fantastic! And you can't do that anymore. You scrounge around the back lot and if you can find one there's usually a tag on it, some television program wants it and you can't have it. What I'm getting at is where the design end kind of *leaves* and it handicaps you. It's one of the reasons they talk about runaway production. When MGM had their back lot — you never saw their back lots, you can't *imagine* their back lots — they had *everything*. They had jungles, they had mountains, it was marvelous. You could have your jungle village, just build it, it was all there and everything.

Now they don't have this stuff. What do they have? Big empty stages. Well, with the technicians that we have today — I did a picture in a town in Mississippi where we went into a gymnasium of a high school, built our sets and shot there. We don't need this so-called wonderful studio because they have given up most of their wonderful stuff, even the matte department and things like that.

BEA: *Plus the cost of making a film here, that's probably —*



Irvin Kershner's "visual shorthand" from THE EMPIRE STRIKES BACK.

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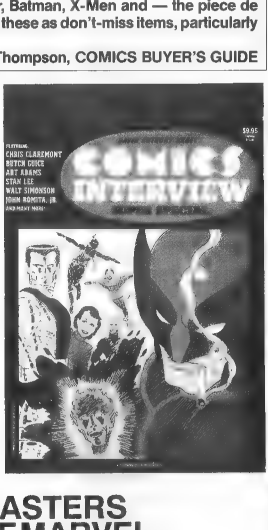

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"You can't believe what research was like at the studio."

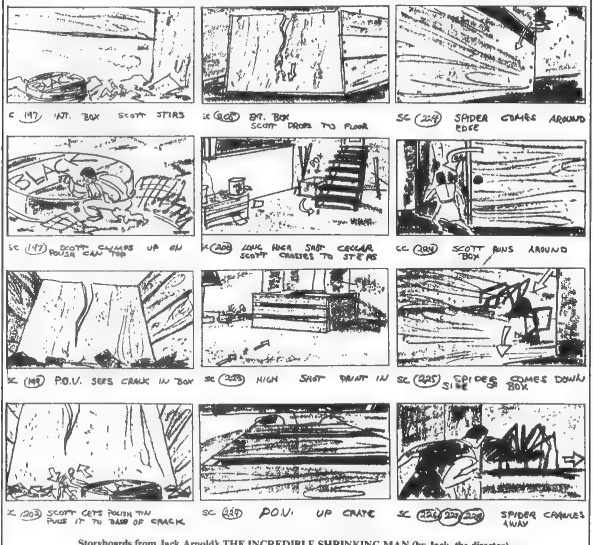
HAROLD: The cost of making a film here means you have to build things and you have to do this and you have to do that — things they used to have in the old days — so you might as well go to Arizona or wherever. There's a business administration syndrome that does this. For instance, the research — we're sitting in a research library right now that was at MGM. They had all the books and everything, all the files and everything like that, and they decided they needed the space.

Well, the woman that took care of this thing, it was too much for her so she sold us the whole thing. We gathered the stuff together, we didn't know where the hell we were going to move it, and finally the AFI said we could have a place with them. So now those offices are empty, and who do you think got those offices? I was hired by **Bob Boyle** on FIDDLER ON THE ROOF and *I* was in the office. So they got rid of all this stuff and installed me, which is a little bit ridiculous. But that's the way they run.

Research, you can't believe what research *was* like at the studio. You'd call and say you needed an airport and all the stuff that goes with an airport, interior and exterior, and they'd bring it up and put it on your desk and you continued to draw. *Now*,— because we are independent here — now you have to take off, you have to leave. First of all, as an illustrator you're not going to do this, so a lot of time the art director would go — he's being paid much more than you — and he has to gather this stuff to bring back. It kills an awful lot of time. You see, all this stuff is money but it's not *recorded* money, so all this help that *was* available is *not* available at the studio anymore.

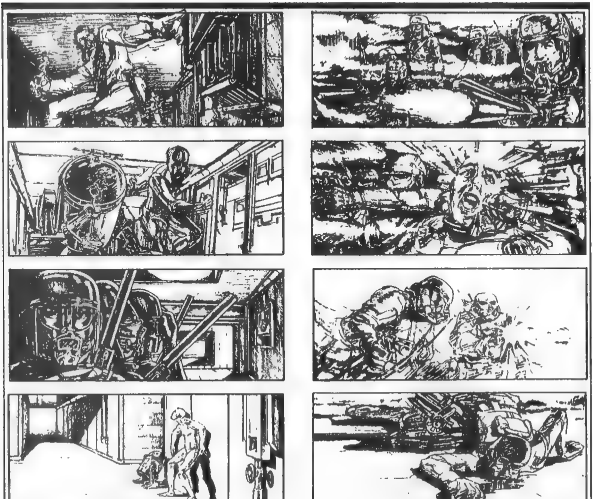
PAUL: *Which is a waste.*

HAROLD: When I was at Warners many years ago they sent in somebody from an accounting firm who was — what do they call them — an *efficiency* type. They had a marvelous research department there, and they go up to this woman up on the third floor and pull open the files and say, "When was the last time you used this?" "Well, about two years ago." "You should throw it out." "But actually it becomes more valuable with time." But, of course, who the hell are you talking to, you know what I mean. Not only does it become more valuable with time, but it also goes into


SC 197 INT. BOX SCOTT STIRS
SC 198 EXT. BOX SCOTT DROPS TO FLOOR
SC 199 SPIDER COMES AROUND EDGE
SC 197 SCOTT CLIMBS UP ON POWER CAN TOP
SC 200 LONG HIGH SHOT SCOTT CROSSES TO STEPS
SC 201 SCOTT RUNS AROUND BOX
SC 198 P.O.V. SEES CRACK IN BOX
SC 202 HIGH SHOT PAINT IN
SC 203 SPIDER COMES DOWN SIDE BOX
SC 203 SCOTT CATS POURS THU POUR IT TU BACK OF CRACK
SC 204 P.O.V. UP CRATE
SC 205 206 207 SPIDER CRAWLS AWAY

Storyboards from Jack Arnold's THE INCREDIBLE SHRINKING MAN (by Jack, the director).

"I wonder if anybody thinks of the product. The bottom



Many months before filming began on George Lucas's STAR WARS, storyboards had to be produced by Alex Taloularis.

other categories, because now it's costume and this that and the other thing. But he says, "Get rid of it."

For instance, an appliance store doesn't sell a refrigerator for a long long time, it's sitting on the floor, and now the refrigerator *is* taking up space so you mark it down so that you can move it out — that's the thinking I believe they use, which is dead *wrong* with our business. It's a *numbers* thinking, there should be a return on a certain square footage. But research, how do you explain it? You're in big trouble because it's all part of it.

PAUL: *That's where creativity —*

HAROLD: We have no numbers. If I tell the guy that this thing saves money, he'll say, "How much?" I couldn't tell him. I could tell him how much it cost him, but there's no way I could tell him what it saved him. So, unfortunately, when you're dealing with numbers you're in trouble

BEA: *Do you think that's probably why there's so many films being put out now — in my mind, this is my personal attitude — that there's just so much product out there that . . .*

PAUL: *It's got no salt, there's nothing to them.*

HAROLD: The last four weeks at the Academy — we go to the Academy every week — I can't believe the mediocrity.

BEA: *And to pay $6.00 —*

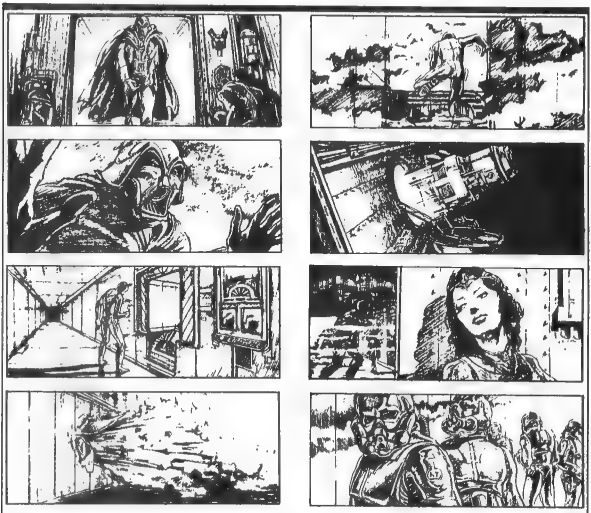
HAROLD: Well, I never pay, you see — and I *still* think I'm cheated. When you don't pay and you're cheated, then you're in trouble. I believe a lot of the thinking that goes into it is just not . . . you see, people coming into the movie industry, there's Coca-Cola and there's **Ted Turner** and all these things, their thinking is all up here. I wonder if anybody up there ever thinks of the product. Do they think of the product, or do they think of the bottom line? I know the bottom line is important, but the product also helps the bottom line.

BEA: *Yeah, exactly. It's just like one film will do well and then there'll be 20 clones of it out, and it's so awful. Nobody wants to take a chance.*

HAROLD: One year it's all these women out in the country or whatever, then it's four kids going exploring, and then **Spielberg** evidently is a remarkable guy, because he evidently does what he likes. And he's very derivative on these things, taking from things that he liked as a young boy and everything like that, but he makes them well. He gives you your *money's* worth! You come out and you feel you saw something worthwhile. The people who jump on the bandwagon have to make it cheap and etc., and they fall by the wayside.

PAUL: *I worked on one film where I really wanted to do a good job on it, but the director wanted to just mimic this film that had just been done. See, a lot of these directors think because somebody else had a success with it that it'll*

line is important, but the product helps the bottom line."



automatically go, but the general public will feel cheated when they've seen it before.

HAROLD: But it's proving out. It happens every damn time.

BEA: *That's what I can't understand.*

HAROLD: You can't understand it?

BEA: *No.*

HAROLD: You are *never* going to understand it. I guarantee you that you are never going to understand it, because it's ununderstandable! *(Laughter.)* I've been involved on a picture that has to do with a black actor, you know, and everybody reads the script and says, "If we can get **Eddie Murphy** we'll make it." "Wait a second, you're not going to get **Eddie Murphy.** He has skyrocketed, you're not going to get him, which means now you throw out the script because you can't get **Eddie Murphy?**" Everybody thinks now along those lines. The primitive way of thinking is unbelievable. Now it's only **Eddie Murphy,** the script doesn't even matter. That takes it out of whatever we think. I'm *still* a guy that thinks that the script is the most important thing.

PAUL: *I do, too.*

HAROLD: And, of course, the actors are important — everybody's important on the goddamn show. But you've got to start off someplace, it *has* to be with the script.

PAUL: *Absolutely.*

HAROLD: But a lot of times they don't give a damn what the script is if they can get so-and-so and so-and-so, make a package and all this other stuff.

PAUL: *Yeah, but then they go, "Why didn't it work?"*

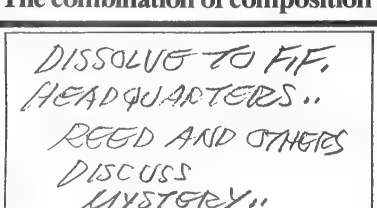
HAROLD: Oh, they'll blame *somebody* — they'll blame the art department. *(Laughter.)* They do not take into consideration — see, we are from a very small voice in the wilderness, our group. When you go into a meeting of the big wheels — I don't go — they wouldn't know what or who or how. You're dealing with Coca-Cola and they want a return on their investment. In the corporate viewpoint we don't really count. So consequently what you have to do is almost make it yourself, because even in the *union* view you don't count. They're talking about not getting screen credits! The man does not know what we do.

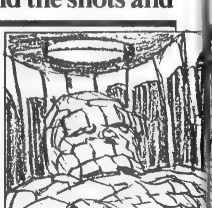
I *know* what I do — and how dare the union tell me that I've got to give up something to get something. It is above the union bullshit. Why don't they consider us talent? The union has us as labor. So you've got to do it yourself. If they knew what makes us feel good — it's their need for us and their *acceptance* of what we have to offer. That's it, period. The money follows. All that stuff just follows.

PAUL: *Which films that you've worked on were your personal favorites and were big successes?*

HAROLD: Well, as an art director I

"The combination of composition and the shots and





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REED DESCRIBES A MOLE

An example of storyboards from television. Here, from Marvel's FANTASTIC FOUR (illustrations by co-creator Jack Kirby).

worked on TERMS OF ENDEARMENT, which was a big success.

PAUL: *THE BIRDS.*

HAROLD: THE BIRDS wasn't a big success. It was fairly successful but it didn't make that kind of a splash, it didn't knock people out. But then there was THE GRADUATE, which was a *huge* success. And VIRGINIA WOLFE, which **Zubie** did the storyboard on, I did the set sketches. **Zubie** worked with the editor on that. The editor was a real old-timer, was in a wheelchair, and he just *knew* — oh, it's so wonderful when you work with terrific people.

PAUL: *Yeah, I like working with the editor.*

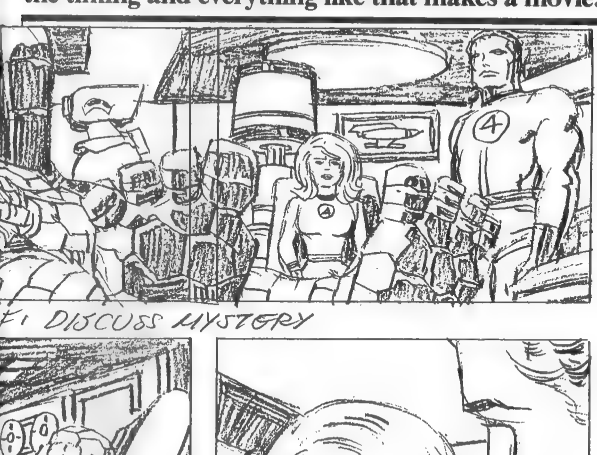
HAROLD: The thing is that what we do is nice and all that other stuff, but the timing, how many frames, is quite a remarkable sense of . . . of whatever they have. The timing is marvelous. So the combination of composition and the shots and the timing and everything like that makes a movie. You can't time your sketches, you know. Only **Hitchcock** could do that

PAUL: *Actually, I do time my sketches, but that's like from being an animator and trying to estimate time — and sometimes you're on but sometimes you're not.*

HAROLD: I can't do that, that's so far out of my thing. I write down "cut" or something like that, but like when **Hitchcock** would sit in the screening room and say twelve frames, *Wow! (Laughter.)*

PAUL: *Which films did you feel were*

the timing and everything like that makes a movie."



really good artistically?

HAROLD: Well, it's a very funny thing but it's very hard to estimate your own ability. When I was doing the sketches for VIRGINIA WOLFE, set sketches, **Dick Sylbert** would say, "Look, this is the type of guy he is, I want you to junk it up." He gave me kind of a free reign and out came some very good sketches. When you're allowed to, or when you're *encouraged* to, there's so many things that enter into it. It's the person that you're working for and it's the group that you're working with, I'm truly convinced — that is where you do your best work.

I noticed the same thing with **Bob Boyle** when I was doing THE BIRDS. I did the sequence when they were all up at Bodega Bay, and I liked it and all that stuff, and I sent it up there and **Hitchcock** liked it so I came up there and everything *worked*. All because everybody's everybody's friend! It sounds corny but it's so goddamn true. A lot of times you say, "Well, maybe I better hold back on this stuff; am I going too far?" It depends an awful lot on the director and who you work with.

PAUL: *Now, what about personal fun on a film, films you just really enjoyed even if they were lousy?*

HAROLD: I . . . Where you get your personal enjoyment is when you bring your stuff to the director and he loves it; to me that is the greatest joy of *all!* I don't give a damn how many dancing girls they have in the art department. *(Laughter.)* You do it and they love it, you know. How can you beat that?

LAST WORD

Comics Interview 234 Fifth Ave. Suite 301 New York, NY 10001

LEE VS. KIRBY

Dear Madam or Sir:

Enclosed is a transcript of a special report I did about **Stan Lee** and **Jack Kirby** on the "Comic Art Commentary" segment of THE CHRONIC RIFT, a weekly show on science fiction, fantasy and comic art.

Please keep in mind that this is a verbatim transcript of a verbal review, so it may sound a little funny.

If you have any questions or comments, please write to the below address. Thanks.

Keith R.A. DeCandido
Associate Producer
THE CHRONIC RIFT
33 Highland Ave.
Yonkers, NY 10705

Transcript of the news portion of the "Comic Art Commentary" segment of THE CHRONIC RIFT, written and presented by Keith R.A. DeCandido.

Taped on Friday 21 September 1990 at 8:30 p.m., aired on Manhattan Cable Channel 17 (D) on Monday 8 October 1990 at 4:30 p.m.

American comics have had many turning points through its history — certain years or periods of years that are very pivotal. For example 1938-39, when National Periodical Publications, now known as DC, put out comics featuring Superman and Batman, which set the mold for the modern superhero.

One of these points is the emergence of Marvel Comics, then called Timely, as a publisher of superheroes, from 1962-1964, with such titles as THE FANTASTIC FOUR, THE HULK, SPIDER-MAN, DAREDEVIL and THE X-MEN, among others. The popular consciousness has thought of **Stan Lee** as the sole creator of this era, which has been Marvel's official stance for lo these 30 years. **Lee** is credited as scripter of these stories, ostensibly collaborating with the artist — for most of them, it was **Jack Kirby.**

Recently there has been a movement to give **Kirby** his proper credit for creation of this work. In a recent interview in COMICS JOURNAL #134, **Kirby** said he created those early characters all by himself, saying that he never saw **Stan Lee** write anything.

This argument has caused much dissention in the field. Some are still asserting **Lee's** supremacy, some are asserting **Kirby's,** and many are trying to find some kind of middle ground.

Inspired mainly by the **Kirby** interview and a recent interview with **Stan Lee** in COMICS INTERVIEW #85, I'd like to put in my two cents: to wit, **Jack Kirby** deserves primary co-creator credit, with **Stan Lee,** for the early Marvel characters.

I have seven points to support this assertion.

Point #1: The "Marvel style," which is how they created comics in the '60s and how they create comics in the '90s, involves a plot outline given to the artist by the writer, who then does the pencils. The script is based as much on the artwork as the plot; and **Stan Lee** has said on a number of occasions, including the COMICS INTERVIEW interview, that the artist usually did the plot anyhow, leaving the script to him.

Point #2: **Stan Lee** has made a career out of hyperbole, PR hucksterism, and self-promotion at others' expense, despite a veneer of self-deprecation. *Anything* he says or asserts should be taken with generous doses of salt.

Point #3: Freelancers were quite literally nothing as far as the company was concerned for all of comics history up until the last ten years or so, and even now they're generally treated like dirt. **Jack Kirby** was just a hired hand, who turned in his work, and had no influence whatsoever on company policy. **Stan Lee's** point of view would be given more credit due to the fact that he was management, he was an editor — **Jack Kirby** was nobody.

Jack Kirby.

Point #4: **Stan Lee** has too many writing credits without **Jack Kirby** for **Kirby's** statement that **Lee** never wrote anything to really hold water.

Point #5: A recent videotape implied that **Stan Lee** created this totally idiotic character called Solarman — a Green Lantern ripoff that was going to be a comic and a Saturday morning cartoon — and he was interviewed on the tape, giving details of how he thought up the character, and all the virtues he gave the character — except the closing credits indicated that someone else entirely created Solarman, which makes one wonder when else he's done this.

Point #6: **Stan Lee** has said absolutely nothing about this. Every time, up to and including the COMICS INTERVIEW piece, he has refused to comment on the question of who created the stuff. **Stan Lee** has *never* been reticent to shoot his mouth off — no matter how little he knows about it, no matter how moronic the statement — on any subject. This lone silence stands out and causes suspicion.

Point #7, and most important: **Jack Kirby** has been creating things since he started out in **Will Eisner** and **Jerry Iger's** studio in the 1930s. He created or co-created Captain America, the Fighting American, numerous comic strips and the very concept of romance comics — all before he worked at Marvel — and after he left Marvel he created the New Gods for DC and — when he came back to Marvel in the '70s — created the Eternals and the Deviants. **Stan Lee** created absolutely nothing before 1962, and — with the sole exception of the She-Hulk (startlingly original one *there*, Stan) — created absolutely nothing since 1966. His muse "vanished" with **Jack Kirby.**

I don't think **Kirby** deserves all the credit. But he does deserve a whole helluva lot more than he's been given, and is at *least* as responsible as **Stan Lee** for the empire that Marvel Comics has built on both of their talents ever since.

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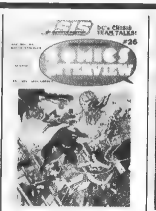

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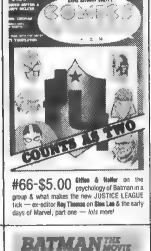

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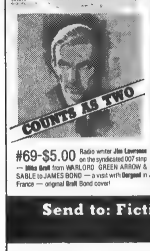

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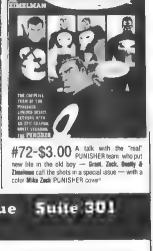

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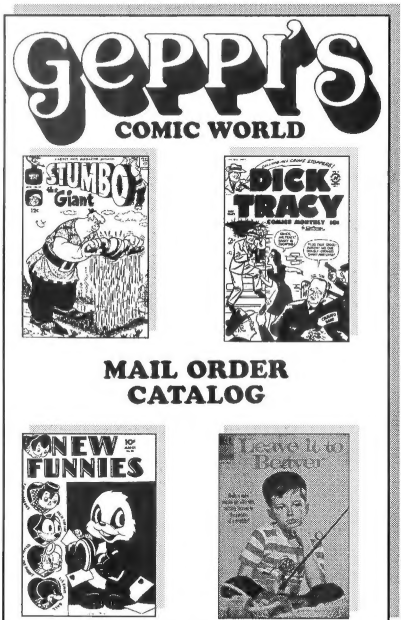

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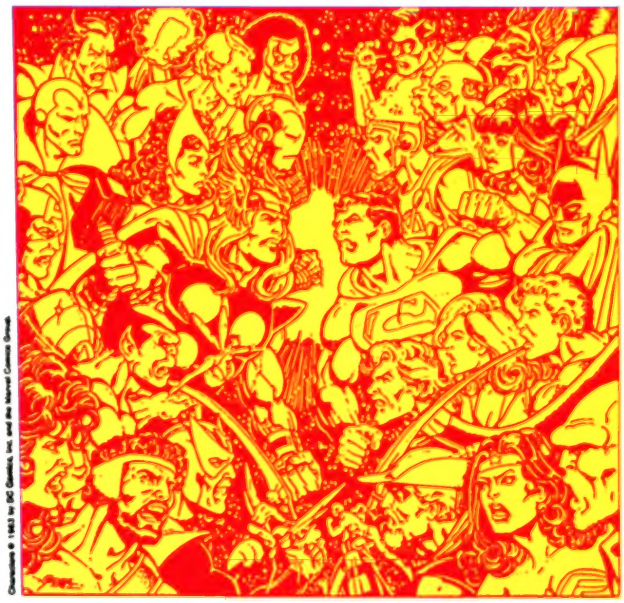

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